CREATING STRATEGIES FOR SUNDAY SCHOOL ATTENDANCE AND PARTICIPATION OF YOUTH, AGES TEN TO SEVENTEEN

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....iv

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....v

DEDICATION.....ix

INTRODUCTION.....1

CHAPTER

1. MINISTRY FOCUS.....4
2. THE STATE OF THE ART IN THIS MINISTRY PROJECT.....14
3. THEORETICAL FOUNDATION AND LITERATURE REVIEW.....24
4. METHODOLOGY.....71
5. FIELD EXPERIENCE.....77
6. REFLECTION, SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION.....102

BIBLIOGRAPHY.....105

ABSTRACT

CREATING STRATEGIES FOR SUNDAY SCHOOL
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YOUTH, AGES TEN TO SEVENTEEN

by

Michelle Marie Fisher-Jones
United Theological Seminary

Mentor

Lester McCorn, D. Min.

This purpose of this study was to develop a strategic plan model that would effectively engage and increase the attendance and participation of youth, ages ten to seventeen, in Sunday school at First Baptist Church, North Indianapolis, Indiana. The hypothesis was based on the premise that through educational workshops, various participants would work together to help develop the intended strategies. The project, facilitated by the researcher, was implemented through collaboration with youth, educators and parents, who engaged in various forms of educational sessions during a five-week period. The effectiveness of the project was measured utilizing the tool of qualitative analysis.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and most importantly, I would give honor with sincere humility to God, for such an enriching and life changing experience. Even though I felt discouraged many times during this stage in my life, I appreciate His grace and mercy for providing me with the strength and tenacity to endure.

Next, I would like to thank the members of my first church home, Van Buren Baptist Church in Gary, Indiana for their role in laying the foundation for my Christian journey; for nurturing me as a child and into my young adulthood. Thank you so much for providing me with lifelong memories and guidance that I will cherish forever. To my Mom, Helen Richardson: I would like to say thank you for taking me to church as a child and youth to Sunday school, Baptist Training Union (BTU), church and prayer meetings, choir rehearsals, and being the example of a leader in Christian Education. I appreciate the foundation you established that formed my expectation of becoming a woman of God. I love you dearly! To my entire Richardson family: thank you Uncle Ruben, Jr. (Junnie) and family, Auntie Gwen and Auntie Carol for giving me love that has produced so many memories from my childhood. I wish you all the best that God has to offer.

I must also acknowledge my 'newly adopted" church family of First Baptist Church North-Indianapolis, Indiana. The congregation, Pastor Ivan D. Hicks and First Lady, Christia Hicks have all been a wonderful inspiration to me and my son, Isaiah, since our first visit on January 1, 2004. Since then, I have grown immensely, and I have

been deeply touched by your love, acceptance, and support. In my heart, I will always appreciate you both and the congregation for the support in implementing this project, which allows us to move progressively forward to fulfill the mandate to produce disciples for Christ.

Thank you to The Dr. Gardner C. Taylor Fellows and other United Theological doctoral students who have progressed along the way. You all have been the most diverse group of people that I have met and got to know at United Theological Seminary. Your kind words of hope and encouragement were "right on time" by giving me the inspiration and determination to continue on what seemed to be, then, an arduous undertaking. Thank you to Dr. Harold Hudson for having confidence in me from the very first day of this program. I appreciate everything you have done in allowing me the opportunity to grow spiritually. Dr. Cothran, thank you for encouraging me to remain focused and organized.

Special thanks to Ma Jones, I don't even have the words. My heart is full of such love and appreciation for you as you have been my cheerleader throughout this whole process. You took wonderful care of my kids during sessions and intensives, allowed me many opportunities to study, and offered words of encouragement to never give up. You said you would not let me quit and you meant it. You are amazing and truly inspirational! I could not have asked for a better mother-in-law. You are truly an example of a God-fearing woman. I love you. Cousin Apryl Jackson, what can I say? You have been my lifeguard ever since I have known you and I am so blessed to be your family. Without your support and love, I don't know what I would have done. Thank you so much for just being there whenever I needed you. Thanks to my sister Tonya and brother-in- law Mike

Cuffee, for calling me across country to constantly check on my progress and offering encouragement. I appreciate how you kept me focused, and always looked out for my family! We really appreciate those "care-boxes!" Love you guys.

Sister in law, Michelle Jackson: thank you so much for helping me and my family with the kids, even though you are known as the "kid magnet," the more the merrier for you! Thank you to my dear childhood friend, Mrs. Meridyth Mack-Johnson (Sweepea), who invited me to First Baptist and made me feel right at home–just like Van Buren Baptist. My college friend, Lisa Fikes, I appreciate your offering me to go to this "church on 28th Street" with you in 2004. It has taken my life into a direction I never thought possible. God knew what He was doing. All of my girlfriends who stood by me and gave a swift kick, and some tough love (Teresa Boone and Tamara Crenshaw), yet you understood and empathized with me. You all never let me quit or give up–priceless! Sister Marie Highbaugh, you are so amazing with your love and support through this "whole" process. From the very beginning, being with me every step, while Nina was in the hospital, attending every surgery and procedure she had, and giving me so much love and encouragement that I never imagined. I remain appreciative that I can learn so much from you on how you give to others without any question or expectations in return. Your heart is golden! Thank you to Maria Garner, whom I trusted to take care of my little Nina at Garners Little Garden Daycare while I returned to work, and continued to pursue this degree. I never had to worry about her because I knew you loved her just as I do. Finally, Principal Kami Phelps, for allowing me many professional courtesies as I labored through this process, even while teaching third graders! Hopefully, now things will be back to "normal" whatever that is.! One last note, to "anyone" whom I have not

mentioned, I trust that you will understand that my head cannot possibly remember nearly all that my heart can express. Truly, there are countless friends and angels who have made an impact in my life, and who have played significant roles in helping me achieve the good of what God has planned. If I failed to record your name in this tribute, forgive me, it is recorded deeply in my heart!

And finally, Dr. L. D. Ervin, for your willingness in providing the final mentoring guidance, as well as your editing expertise in the completion of this document, I thank you! You have been extremely influential in providing me with the confidence I need to continue doing God's will.

DEDICATION

To my children Isaiah Michael, Nina Marie (Mike Jr., Mickayla and Mignon),

and my Endearing Husband, Michael Lee, Sr.

To my Grandparents, Ruben Howard and Lillie Richardson,

Cousin Ruben III, and Aunt Jerri…Thank you for

smiling on me from above,

I miss you so much.

I love you with all of my heart and appreciate your support. Your understanding and patience during this journey was invaluable. I am truly blessed to have you as my family. May God forever shine His love on us all as we continue to grow in God for the fulfillment of His purpose.

INTRODUCTION

The focus of this project is to establish a program that encourages youth, ages ten to seventeen to attend and participate in Sunday school at First Baptist Church, Indianapolis, Indiana. Historically, Sunday schools, vehicles for introducing literacy, reading and writing competency, have been instrumental in providing hope and inspiration for African Americans.

Sunday school was often the first place where black people made contact with the educational process; first hearing, then memorizing, and finally learning to read Bible stories.[1] Sunday school was the beginning of active reading and studying God's word for life's application. Sunday schools provided the moral and ethical compass for children and adults. This educational system did so by teaching biblical principles of differences between right and wrong, and how to apply them for everyday living.

The researcher believes that Sunday school should be a priority for every youth, especially for African American youth who are often deprived of many educational opportunities. Through the combination of both parental support and youth involvement, the youth are able to open and keep lines of communication open; promote an

[1] C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African American Experience* (Durhan, NC: Duke University Press, 1990), 251.

understanding of compassion and empathy, and establish a spiritual relationship that will impact families of today, and most importantly for future generations.

The researcher, throughout her youth, was a product of Sunday schools. For her, Sunday school reinforced the biblical teachings, instruction, and discipline taught in the home. Through Sunday school, she gained the guidance, wisdom, the peace and the self-esteem necessary as a growing teen. Dr. Gardner C. Taylor, known as the "Dean of Preachers" once stated, "Raising self-esteem is social justice!"[2] For the writer, Sunday school gave her the opportunity to know Christ, and through that knowledge, she was empowered to grow in confidence and self-esteem.

Realizing the decrease in youth participation in Sunday school, the researcher feels the church has the responsibility to help them understand the value of biblical learning; how this lack of knowledge and education contributes to the lack of confidence, self-esteem and growth. The researcher feels she can help the youth of First Baptist Church gain that same kind of knowledge and empowerment through Sunday school.

In Chapter One, the writer summarizes her spiritual journey, including experiences and circumstances that played a role in the selection of this project. The chapter reviews the ministry context, including the demographics of First Baptist Church and the surrounding communities. The chapter clearly communicates to the reader the basis for the project, the role of the writer, research and data collection techniques, and the expected outcome for the ministry.

Chapter Two explores writings and literature presented by earlier writers throughout time relating to the topic. The chapter explores any thoughts or concepts on

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[2] Dr. Gardner C. Taylor, Interview, Raleigh Durham, North Carolina, April 3, 2013.

the subject that may have evolved through time. The chapter also examines the impact of prior literature in addressing the role of Sunday school, its purpose and benefits.

Chapter Three provides the reader with an in-depth analysis of the biblical, historical and theological concepts centered on current concepts and trends regarding Sunday school. The chapter includes a thorough examination how Scripture and Spirituality connect to the project. This chapter, through a clear understanding of the connection between the spirituality autobiography of the writer, the ministry context, and the researched literature, serves as a bridge to Chapter Four.

Chapter Four describes the methodology and research design for guiding the project. The chapter provides a specific plan of action in completing the study. The chapter clearly explains the use of focus groups, pre and post-tests, group discussions, and workshop data in gaining an understanding of challenges of involving African American youth in Sunday school.

Chapter Five includes comprehensive results of the research, including a summary of the group sessions, discussions, and interactions that allowed the gathering of the needed data. The chapter provides a clear understanding of the research site, the participants, pre and post-test data, an analysis of that data, and how the project can be used by other churches.

Chapter Six provides the summary, reflection and conclusion of the project. The researcher presents a thoughtful evaluation that outlines the project, including the successes and shortcomings. In addition, the chapter provides recommendations for possible adjustments in future projects, research and training.

CHAPTER ONE

MINISTRY FOCUS

The primary objective of this study is to develop a model that will result in a dramatic increase of youth, ages 11-17, attending Sunday school at First Baptist Church, North Indianapolis, Indiana. The project focuses on issues that have caused youth to withdraw from Sunday school; as well as presenting solutions and educational tools for use in the successful re-engagement of youth in Sunday school.

Church Sunday school has proven to be an educational system that promotes literacy and empowerment. The church is known as a place that instills morals; where one can find an ethical structure of Christian principles and values. Learning and applying these values were contributing factors in preparing youth to be productive members of the community. The church, especially the Black church, has a history of providing educational consistency, relevance, and purpose.

Unfortunately, there has been a consistent decline in Sunday school attendance by the African American youth. Many factors contribute to this dilemma, including a changing society that entices our youth with many other alternatives. Their innocence does not provide them with the necessary tools to understand that the teaching of God addresses their needs in ways that are relevant, applicable, and rewarding.

The context of this project is First Baptist Church of North Indianapolis, Indiana, where the writer serves as an Associate Minister. As a member of First Baptist Church

since 2004, and through her role as Associate Minister, she can attest to the lack of participation of youth in Sunday school classes. Based on her various roles in ministry, her vocation as an educator, as well as her overall concern for the well-being of youth, the writer felt the need to take on this project.

Spiritual Autobiography

The writer was born March 16, 1969 in Fort Wayne, Indiana to the parents of Gerard Fisher and Helen Richardson, who was 21 years old and unmarried. Helen, in her second year at Howard University in Washington, D.C., postponed her studies to handle her pregnancy. In addition, the father of the writer, Gerard, age 21, was the father of another child, who by birth became the half-sister of the writer. The major problem was that Gerard was married to the mother of the half-sister of the writer. That reality caused hurt and pain to the mother of the writer. In an effort to escape the pain and conflicts of these circumstances, Helen moved to Ft. Wayne and was accepted as a resident in a Catholic home for unwed mothers. Following the birth of the writer, Helen returned to her hometown, Gary, Indiana, where the writer was raised as an only child. She and her mother lived with her maternal grandparents. However, based on the strained relationship between Helen and Gerard, initially, the writer only knew members of her maternal family, which included her grandparents and other relatives.

At the age of four, the writer recalls moving with her mother to an apartment in Gary, Indiana. Some months later, a man, who lived near the apartment of an aunt came to visit and introduced himself as Gerard, the biological father of the writer. This was the first time the writer experienced a feeling of rejection. As a first grade student, due to

financial problems, she and her mother moved back to the home of her grandparents, where they lived until the writer reached age 12. At that landmark, she was introduced to Jesus Christ, and eagerly became involved in all-day worship services, participation in the choir, and serving as Sunday school secretary.

Her mother, a Christian woman, filled the home with Bibles, pamphlets, brochures, and other Christian literature, which implanted in her a desire to learn more about Christ. Anyway, since she was the only child, and since she did not have anything else to do, she found herself gravitating toward books and seeking knowledge. The writer grew to understand and discern others' emotions; became empathetic, observant, and intuitive. This was also a time of adolescence, when the writer realized life was changing; when she began making poor choices. For instance on one occasion she "lied" to her mother about going with an older friend to a street carnival. When the writer returned home, her mother, upset, frustrated and furious, administered some expected punishment that, to the writer, "far exceeded the crime." The severity of the punishment left the writer, as a child, with many unpleasant thoughts: "How could someone so beautiful, poised, educated, and a Christian be like that? Mom 'had it going on.' I knew she was struggling, but to the writer, it seemed that all of her needs were being met."

Emotionally and physically hurt, the writer continued to think how her mother "constantly reminded her how 'hard it was,' and how her 'daddy' was not doing his part." The writer could only think, "Well what's wrong with me, especially since my name is his; I look like him; and have his mannerism. I am not wanted. I am told that my paternal relatives don't want me, which caused me to lose the female validation that only a father could give a daughter. Where does that leave me as a female child, other than scarred

with self-doubt, abandonment and low self-esteem?" All of these emotions, not validated by her father, and not nurtured by her mother, left the writer feeling of no value; left her feeling ashamed and unworthy of love.

Later in life, after years of suffering from these feelings of brokenness, the writer became schooled on "generational curses." Suffering from these curses, hurt and lonely, the writer gained relief through her involvement in athletics, and commitment to studying. Most of her childhood was an emotional and mental rollercoaster. Regardless of the studying and the athletics, the writer always felt alone. Although she had plenty of time to think, the thoughts were a mixture of good, but mostly not so good thoughts. Even though she would think of her own hurts, she would also think how her mother still struggled with the pains of her past.

At age 18, while she and a friend enjoyed the sandy beach of Lake Michigan, they used a small raft to go out on the water. Without the presence of a lifeguard and no life vests, the strong winds pushed them out into the lake. They escaped death with the help of an unknown passerby who heard their screams and ran for help.

The writer was blessed to attend college at Ball State University, Muncie, Indiana. Her college years were met with many hardships. At age 21, she was diagnosed with "Graves Disease," which affects the thyroids, and required radioactive treatment. She suffered from bulging eyes, pale skin, hair loss, and constant pain. However, her most severe pains came from the lack of support and love of her father. His rejection caused her serious emotional and physical pain, which set the stage for her to distrust men. All men became the enemy. Still, she was able to graduate in 1992, and immediately moved to Cincinnati.

In Cincinnati, she gained employment as a nutritional educator with the Hamilton County Cooperative Program, which was a nutritional program as an extension of Ohio State University. As a resident of Cincinnati, she spent four years gravitating towards abusive men who inflicted her with additional mental, emotional and physical pain. As she sought solutions through professional counseling, she felt a sense of being worthless and of "no value." She found value in working with youth, especially in the area of nutrition, and served as a long-term substitute in Cincinnati Public Schools.

In 1995, as she struggled to develop confidence and stability, the writer was shaken when God called home her beloved grandmother. This was followed by the loss of her job with the Cincinnati Public Schools. Some years earlier, the writer attended the traditional church New Year's Eve service. At midnight, as the service exploded with joyful songs of praise, and inspired praying, the Holy Spirit moved the writer with shouting and praising until she passed out; awakening sometime later soaked in perspiration. That night, she had surrendered her life to Christ. Now, in 1995, emotionally and physically hurting; with no money, no friends, and no real support, the writer knew it was necessary to again surrender her life to Christ. On April 1, 1996, guided by the Holy Spirit, she moved to Indianapolis, Indiana. This transition changed her perspective on God.

Shortly after relocating to Indianapolis, she was hired by Bank One (now Chase Bank). Later, she was hired by the Indiana Public Schools to teach Home Economics. At that time, she was assured of the presence of God, which gave her peace. Although she attended various churches, she could not find the comfort and spiritual nurturing she

desired. However, in year 2002, her peace was disrupted. During that time she met Marvin.[1]

As their uncommitted relationship developed, Marvin became hurtful and abusive. Based on her past relationships, she was determined not to experience any similar stress and strain. As she worked toward ending their relationship, she learned of her pregnancy. For several reasons, the writer did not make a decisive break from the relationship. As she endured some minor acts of abuse, she was overjoyed on February 26, 2003 when God blessed her with a son, Isaiah Michael. Amid that joy, the minor acts of abuse from Marvin grew with intensity. At that time, the writer, determined to end all abuse, established relationship guidelines that only involved Marvin as a parent.

The writer, devoting her time and energy to caring for her child, did not actively seek fellowship with a church for the rest of the year. That changed with the arrival of 2004, with the arrival of a New Year, she made the resolution to re-commit her life to Christ. On the first Sunday of January, she attended First Baptist Church-North Indianapolis. There, she not only found that missing spiritual connection; she found the kind of warmth and love she needed, including reuniting with the daughter of her former director, who had relocated from Gary, Indiana. In addition to welcoming Christ back into her life, she met Michael Jones, whom she also welcomed and married in 2005.

Michael was a trustee of the church, but even more important, Michael was committed to the church and to God. He deeply cares for his three children, his mother, and he came to show the same kind of care and love for the writer. Michael entered her life when she was in need of stability, acceptance, and a family. She was at a place and

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[1] To avoid any possible legal ramifications, Marvin is used instead of the birth name of the person.

time when the need of stability, family, acceptance and support were most important and critical. She was broken in spirit even though her mind and soul knew better. Michael, in addition to everything else, provides the balance needed by the writer. She now recognizes that even though her biological father was not physically, emotionally or financially available for whatever reasons, her Heavenly Father has shown more mercy, love and grace than anyone could. She feels that through the pains and hardships, God was preparing her to work in His great kingdom.

Many years early, she experienced several unexplained visions, including the vision of being on a ship with the engine burning. As the ship burned, the writer was busy trying to extinguish the fire. In 2010, during consultations with the pastor, she was encouraged to commune with God relative to more specific work in ministry. That advice eventually led the writer to United Theological Seminary, where she entered the Doctor of Ministry program. As the writer has continued to evolve through those studies; God has opened doors of ministry at First Baptist, where she serves as an associate minister. Every aspect of her being is changing; emotionally, professionally, mentally and of course spiritually.

On January 27, 2011, God blessed their marital union with the birth of Nina Marie. Even with that blessing, on month later, she was diagnosed with a brain aneurism, which presented the family with many challenges. Through it all, the writer feels she is steadily evolving into a better person with greater esteem and responsibilities ahead. She is also very much honored that God has chosen her to be a vessel for Jesus Christ, and does not assume that responsibility lightly. In April 2007, the writer was called and

appointed to serve as an associate minister at First Baptist Church. Her roles include being the Youth Minister and serving on the Women's Ministry Executive Ministry.

Context

First Baptist Church is an African American congregation located within the United Northwest Area (UNWA); with boundaries from interstate I-65 and Meridian Street (between 38th and 30th Streets) to the east; by 16th Street to the south; by White River to the west and by 38th Street to the north.[2] The mission of UNWA is to promote the economic and physical development needs within the United Northwest Area community.[3]

The history behind ANWA dates back to the early 1800's; was known for its new homes, St. Vincent Hospital, golfing areas, churches, museums, Riverside Amusement Park, and areas along the White River for entertainment. The neighborhood, formerly a thriving and affluent white community, changed in the late seventies to early eighties. As businesses and the white middle-class moved away from the area, it became filled with poor African-Americans, and economic disinvestment followed.[4] Currently, the community is a working class, with mid to lower income families, and primarily African American.

The history of First Baptist Church-North Indianapolis dates back to 1885 when a group of followers of Christ joined and established a ministry in the area of Edgemont

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[2] "United Northwest Area Development Corporation(UNWA)" http://unwadcindy.com/Contact_Us.html, Google host (accessed December 15, 2010).

[3] Ibid.

[4] Eric B. Schoch, "Another old pastime bites the dust: amusement park set for demolition," *Indianapolis Star*, 26 November 1978, 3:1.

and Rader Streets. In 1978 the congregation relocated to 880 W. 28th Street, Indianapolis, Indiana. First Baptist has a membership of approximately eight hundred, whereby eighteen percent are ages 0-21 years old; thirty percent are ages 22-40 years old, thirty six percent are ages 41-62, and seventeen percent are ages 63 and above.

Synergy

In 2004, the writer became a faithful member of the First Baptist Church family. Her faith and discipleship grew out of her childhood experiences in the church, including reading and studying the Bible; attending Sunday school, serving as Sunday school secretary; attending long church services, that sometimes lasted all day; involvement with youth programs; and singing in the youth choir. Her love for learning continued from high school to college; to graduate school, and becoming a teacher within the public school system, with a focus on teaching children.

In April 2007 the writer was called and appointed to serve as an associate minister, which includes preaching the Hour of Power on Wednesday, visiting members in the hospital, and following up with those who are grieving. Additional duties include providing assistance with Sunday school and youth ministry, and helping with Bible study classes throughout the week. Finally, other duties include assisting any other committees with planning activities such as Women's Day, Youth Fellowship, church social gatherings, and making specialized gift baskets for visitors. Through her years of membership, and her current ministry, the writer has become personally aware that youth are not attending Sunday school. This project grew out of that awareness and the desire to play a role in changing their lack of participation. The writer feels that her own

involvement in the church as a youth, her continued work with youth, and her work in ministry at First Baptist have prepared her for this project.

CHAPTER TWO

THE STATE OF THE ART IN MINISTRY PROJECT

Daniel Aleshire, in the book *Christian Education and Theology* says "Christian education involves those tasks and expressions of ministry that enable people (1) to learn the Christian story, both ancient and present; (2) to develop the skills they need to act out their faith: (3) to reflect on that story in order to live self-aware to its truth; and (4) to nurture the sensitivities they need to live together as a covenant community.[1] Throughout history, education has been the foundation of a society. Most importantly, education was mandated by God for humans to live in a covenant community. That foundation was reinforced by God in the giving of the Commandments, some six hundred rules and laws that are best known as "The Ten Commandments."

God selected and anointed the prophet Moses to serve as the teacher of the Commandments. Since that time, prophets, teachers and others have continued that teaching. For Christians, teaching God's law continues today, primarily in settings known as Sunday school. Even though adults are the primary recipients of teachings in Sunday school, the teachings of God were intended for every human, especially youth. Although that is the intent, in reality, Sunday school classes have become less and less attractive to youth.

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[1] Daniel Aleshire, *Christian Education and Theology in Christian Education Handbook*, ed. Bruce P. Powers (Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman, 1996), 13-28.

Whereas this trend is alarming, the lack of the attendance of African Americans in Sunday school has become a major concern. Generally, the church plants the blame on several factors for this dilemma: cultural shifts throughout society; poverty and financial problems; the lack of role models in the family and community; and claims that youth are distracted by other alternatives. As the writer responds to this problem, this chapter will focus on the literature and writings of known authors who provide a variety of observations and recommendations relating to youth attendance, participation and retention in Sunday school.

According to the authors of *The Black Church in the African American Experience,* Christian principles were not only taught on Sunday by preaching sermons. The incorporation of a more structured form of education determined the need to further advance the literacy of the individual member and eventually the Black church as a congregation.[2] For African Americans, education was considered also a means to uplift a community. Sunday school was established for black people not only as a gathering place, but was considered to be the most effective strategy and main form of communicating with people.[3] Sunday schools were often the first places where black people made contact with the educational process: first hearing, then memorizing, and finally learning to read Bible stories.[4] Sunday schools also were the beginning of active reading and studying God's word for life's application.

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[2] C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African American Experience* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1990), 251.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Ibid.

According to Steve Parr, "Some will argue that it (Sunday school) is not relevant because of the failure of their church or the failure of others to do it successfully."[5] There are other issues that affect growth in Sunday school according to Steve Parr. He states that in some cases, "churches did not practice open-enrollment, new members were "falling through the cracks" because they were not connecting, finding relationships or receiving ministry."[6]

This "failure" and/or "doing it unsuccessfully," according to Parr is based on the premise that strategies are outdated, and therefore some new model must be implemented in order to be successful.[7] The writer can only speculate that these beliefs may be stemming from past disappointments, fear of moving forward, or just liking the "way things were" based on deep-rooted traditions.

In her book, *Postmodern Children's Ministry: Ministry to Children in the 21st Century*, Ivy Beckwith addresses looking at "spiritual formation of children in our emerging and changing culture"[8] Her concerns focus on children's ministry programs, including addressing the needs of the children in a postmodern society where spiritual formulation is most important when growing into adulthood. As she details her concerns for the church to find ways that address the cultural changes she says, "postmodernism

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[5] Steve R. Parr, *Sunday School That Really Works: A Strategy for Connecting Congregations and Communities* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2010), 24.

[6] Ibid., 150.

[7] Ibid., 25.

[8] Ivy Beckwith, *Postmodern Children's Ministry: Ministry to Children in the 21st Century* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 13.

was not an enemy of the church to be defeated but something that could lead the church into a new place of relevancy.[9]

She believes that there are many programs that can be incorporated to make children's ministry more appealing and more "fun." Her view is that "the learning experiences we provide children should be appealing, engrossing, and creative.[10] Beckwith concurs that the church, "in spite of its good intentions in the church's ministry to children over the last two decades, [has] forgotten what spiritually shaping these young lives is really all about and how to do it."[11]

Relevance of Sunday School

Steve R. Parr, in the book *Sunday School That Really Works* presents the argument that Sunday school needs to be relevant, and its purpose wedded with appropriate practices.[12] That is, the teachings and stories of the Bible and/or related godly principles must have meaning for youth in their lives; their present and perhaps in their future. Parr further explains:

> The purpose is to enable the church to strategically embrace and engage the Great Commission. That is accomplished when classes work together to take the gospel into their community (Go therefore and make disciples of all nations), initiate new Christians into a community of believers (baptizing in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit), and lead those believers to have a growing relationship with Jesus Christ (teaching them to observe all things I have commanded you; and

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[9] Ibid., 12.

[10] Ibid., 10.

[11] Ibid., 11.

[12] Steve R. Parr, *Sunday School That Really Works: A Strategy for Connecting Congregations and Communities* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2010), 25.

> lo I am with you always, even to the end of age). It is not appropriate to assign irrelevance to the strategy just because some have lost focus and have failed to appropriately and effectively utilize the Sunday school. The problem is that many Sunday school ministries, if not most have lost focus. Those that have stayed focused on, or have refocused on, the biblical purpose can be referred to in many ways, but not irrelevant.[13]

Lisa Delpit, author of *Other Peoples Children* explains that "if we do not have some knowledge of children's lives outside the realms of pencil and paper work, or even outside their classrooms, then we cannot know their strengths."[14] In other words, Delpit is affirming the need to provide teachings that will be relevant in the lives of the youth, especially in their community. Michael J. Anthony, in the book *Christian Education* says that "Jesus is a model for all who are called to teach."[15] As a Master teacher, Jesus addressed the needs of his context by using purposeful and meaningful content that could be applied to daily living.

Delpit, continuing with that theme says,

> Cultural relevant teaching is passionate about knowledge. Cultural relevant teaching views knowledge critically. Teaching is essentially a learned profession. A teacher is a member of a scholarly community. He or she must understand the structure of subject matter, principles of the conceptual organization and the principles of inquiry that help answer two kinds of questions in each field: what are the important ideas and skills in this domain? And how are the new ideas added and the deficient ones dropped by those who produce knowledge in this area? That is, what are some of the rules and procedures of good scholarship and inquiry?[16]

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[13] Ibid., 25.

[14] Lisa Delpit, *Other People's Children*: *Culture Conflict in the Classroom* (New York: The New Press, 1995), 172.

[15] Michael J. Anthony, *Christian Education: Foundations for the Twenty-First Century* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 115.

[16] Lisa Delpit, *The Dreamkeepers: Successful Teachers of African American Children* (San Francisco: John Wiley and Sons, 1995), 30.

Authors Talmage Johnson and Stan Toler, Rediscovering Sunday School, state that Sunday school is the appropriate place to present claims of the Gospel.[17] These authors make reference in their work from the author Ken Hemphill, *Revitalizing the Sunday School Dinosaur*, which suggests eight reasons why Sunday school is the *growth tool* of the future.[18] Their focus is about the aspect of evangelism in Sunday school:

1. Sunday school provides a centralized and simplified strategy-Sunday school can be organized in a way that focuses on evangelism.
2. Sunday school is familiar-most people who have entered church have had some exposure to Sunday school and it sets the environment for building relationships.
3. Sunday school is a solid foundation for invocation–Sunday school is a great atmosphere for introducing new methods of sharing Christ.
4. Sunday school is a natural companion to an exciting worship service–if people in the community attend worship services first, Sunday school still provides the best method for assimilating those newcomers so they feel attached to a family.
5. Sunday school gets people involved in service–Sunday school is a great place to share faith, and a rapport is established where it is more likely an opportunity to grant workers permission to present Christ.
6. Sunday school provides small group experience–people are more likely to feel more open and honest in small group settings. It also makes them feel wanted, safe and welcomed. They feel free to express their spiritual needs as it helps to promote spiritual growth.
7. Sunday school is not tied to a single personality–Sunday school is and optimum place to establish friendships because of its structure, not necessarily the people involved. The interaction of teacher and student prevails over personality.
8. Sunday school has a proven track record–many people introduced to Christ were through Sunday school. Most Sunday school workers will respond favorably to a Sunday school evangelism program because they know how important that ministry was in their own conversions.[19]

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[17] Talmage Johnson and Stan Toler, *Rediscovering Sunday School* (Kansas City, MO: Beacion Hill Press, 2000), 38.

[18] Ibid.

Sunday school, in regards to youth, provides the tools that youth will need to maintain their faith when they become adults. It takes the entire church body to develop youth and empower youth to understand who they are in Christ.

Strategies for Re-engagement

Responsibility must include and be shared among church leadership, parents, Christian educators, community, and youth. The primary classroom for any child begins in the home. From the youth are placed in a consistent environment, they begin to learn and understand the world in which they live. As Christian parents, it is the God-given command that parents are to instruct with love in conjunction with the fear of God. Verbal and visible pronouncement is important in declaring this intention. The head of the household should lead in prayer of dedication.[20]

As children become older and face more challenges, it is increasingly important that the parental lines of communication stay honest and open. This can be a challenge for many parents, who may feel they are not equipped to handle some of the issues that face the their child. Parents must believe and have faith in their abilities that God, through prayer, and the guidance of the Holy Spirit, will be their source of relief and anxiety during these times. Thomas White also explains how keeping the communication lines open begins at an early age, as it should establish trust between parents and their children. He states:

> Confront ungodly issues: talk to your children about the differences between Christian values and those of the world. Elementary school age children are not

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[19] Ibid., 38-39.

[20] Thomas B. White, *The Believer's Guide to Spiritual Warfare* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1990), 106.

> too young to start learning this. At the appropriate time, talk straight forwardly about premarital sex, drug use, occultism, political corruption, and covetousness, the effects of heavy metal music and content in television and movies. Don't terrorize them but make sure they are informed when they need to be. Fathers must especially define values and exercise wise spiritual authority when children violate these values. Improper attitudes, such as disrespect, rebellion, and deceit must be recognized and dealt with. As Christian parents you need to recognize that a concerted assault is being made on the hearts and minds of your children. Satan has a strategy to divert them from God and lead them into destruction. A godly lifestyle in the home can help protect them.[21]

Thomas B. White, author of *The Believer's Guide to Spiritual Warfare*, provides biblical reasoning and effective strategies for establishing the home as a place consecrated and dedicated to God. Parents have an essential role and responsibility for teaching their children, and should be working in the same accord that the Bible establishes. White also informs that single mothers may do the same for their household and children as well. He believes that homes should honor the Lord by filling them with objects and activities that bring glory to God.[22] His suggestion is that parents must remember that what the eye sees, the mind and heart will follow.[23] A placement of Christian symbols, paintings, books, and things of the same should be considered as they catch the eye and direct the mind toward God. Regular times of reading God's Word, prayer and praise should also be established as the norm in a Christian environment.[24]

When considering the needs of Sunday school ministry, it should be recognized that it is not only one person doing the work. The overall goal or purpose of the church must be fully explained initially so that everyone is in agreement. According to Steve

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[21] Ibid., 108-109.

[22] Ibid., 107.

[23] Ibid.

[24] Ibid.

Parr, author of *Sunday School that Really Works*, Sunday schools are an effective entity of Christian education that provides the foundation required to help achieve the goals of the church overall. He states: "A Sunday school that really works is one that equips and challenges the classes, small or groups to move beyond the church and into the community, working together to share the gospel and bring people to Christ."[25]

The mission statement needs to be clear and concise. It is absolutely essential that pastoral and other church leadership be supportive to the efforts and the cause of the program. The programs will not develop and flourish if this support is not given initially. Afterwards, the realization that it takes a diverse group of persons to work from different capacities in which they serve should be explained. The team effort approach is vital for program effectiveness, but everyone should work in their area of expertise and responsibility. This will enable the persons involved to focus, and be precise in their prospective roles. This type of approach is more conducive and productive in obtaining desired outcomes when group collaboration begins. Everyone will have valuable input to the program they are working on.

Effective leadership, although often difficult, is very vital to the very existence of a Christian education program. According to Doug Fields, author of *The Purpose Driven Youth Ministry*, "Leadership separates a purpose driven youth ministry from an event and activity driven youth ministry."[26] Fields explains that the purpose of any ministry must have a clear and concise purpose that is spelled out so plainly so the congregation will be supportive. He suggests that leaders establish the purpose statement and use it

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[25] Steve R. Parr, *Sunday School That Really Works: A Strategy for Connecting Congregations and Communities* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2010), 23.

[26] Doug Fields, *The Purpose Driven Youth Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 70.

repetitiously in verbal and written communication. He also suggests that students learn the purpose and memorize it. Finally, it is suggested to make the purpose statement visible for everyone to see it.[27]

The goal of Sunday school is not only to increase youth participation and attendance, but to bring souls to Christ and to develop youth to be active within the congregation. This mandate was clearly illustrated and commanded by our Risen Lord in the giving of the Great Commission. Sunday school has much "staying power" as it has been a formidable aspect to Christian education. In summary of the above text, Sunday school promotes a sense of belonging, while teaching the Gospel through non-evasive instructional methods. It allows many opportunities for growth and development while establishing long lasting relationships and memories.

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[27] Ibid., 71.

CHAPTER THREE

THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

Proverbs 29:15 says, "The rod of correction imparts wisdom, but a child left to himself disgraces his mother." The Word of God spoken through the prophet Solomon was designed to serve as a model and guide for the people of God throughout the course of time. The Word was especially intended for youth, who were in need of being molded and shaped God early in life, which could enhance their overall enjoyment, fun, and fulfillment in life. On the other hand, the writer understands the argument offered by the *U.S. News and World Report* that the new generation of young people in both high school and college, think less about fun and 'self-fulfillment' and more about careers and jobs.[1]

As Solomon understood and carried out his mandate to impart the Word of God to the youth of his day, today, the church is responsible for imparting that same mandate. The church, in fulfilling that responsible role, must start early in the life of the youth. And since the years of adolescence is tumultuous time of change for the youth, teaching and training are more significant as observed by Lawrence Richards who says: "It is vital in planning for ministry with youth that we understand the styles in which youth tend to think and feel, and shape our ministries to what they are, not to what we might think they

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[1] "A New Generation: Where It's Heading," in *U. S. News and World Report*, September 6, 1976, 45.

ought to be. It is particularly important when we examine the values of youth that we understand the cultural forces that affect them.[2]

It is evident that values taught in Sunday school are the beginning of laying the foundation to understand God's principles and teachings of Christ. Regardless of any circumstance, youth need to be taught and trained for the journey of life through established vessels of the church; and Sunday school should be a primary vessel.

And although this mandate is not new, the challenge for many church leaders appears to be "how can such a task even begin?" "What strategies are useful for attracting youth into the church?" These responses cause serious negative results not only for the youth, but in the life of the church. Those negative results include the loss of many of our youth to the streets, worshiping other gods, and the loss of future leaders and messengers for Christ.

The researcher was compelled to study the decline of participation in Sunday school among the youth ages ten to seventeen, particularly. This is an age where the desire is still there but effective guidance is imperative in order to address these issues. The researcher chose to view perspectives from teachers/youth leaders, the parents and most importantly the youth to determine factors influencing negative outcomes. Some of the presumptions were: youth are more active, particularly on Sundays. There are games, practices and other extra-curricular events held on Sundays now. Also, parents now work on Sunday; families have more options to choose from for activities therefore leaving church a less priority. More demand on time seems to be an issue where people are not

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[2] Lawrence Richards, *Youth Ministry* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishers, 1972), 14.

willing to be in church all day as in the past. One more concern could be that of lack of transportation for many.

Biblical Foundation

In Proverbs 22:6, the Word of God says to "Train up a child in the way he should go so that when he is old, he will not depart from it."[3] As God speaks to the Israelites, there is reference to the home as the main influence in the life of a growing child; [that is] young people would learn most from their parents, grandparents, and village elders.[4] Learning is first initiated in the home regardless of what is specifically being taught. Children respond and often imitate the influences of their environment and acquire learned behaviors. During biblical times, God constantly expressed concern for the teaching and learning of children. John Drane, in the book *Introducing the Bible* tells us that there is evidence that Canaanite city-states had a formal education system.[5]

Throughout the Bible, teaching is a primary concern of God. The objective of teaching is to impart knowledge mainly through specific lessons with expectation of a desired outcome. Adam and Eve were taught by God, as well as Noah. God commanded Moses to teach laws to His people. Many of these teachings have been included in writings by Moses in the Book of Deuteronomy.

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[3] Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture references are taken from the New International Version of the Bible.

[4] John Drane, *Introducing the Bible*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011), 221.

[5] Drane, 221.

Old Testament

The subject of teaching is the primary focus in the selected text from the book of Deuteronomy, one of the five books of the Pentateuch. *Nelson's* provides an overview of these historic books: "Pentateuch, a Greek term meaning 'five-volumed' refers to the first five books of the Old Testament. The Jews traditionally refer to this collection as 'the Book of the Law,' or simply 'the Law.' Another word for this collection, 'Torah,' means 'instruction, teaching, or doctrine. . . .' The Pentateuch is generally divided into six major sections."[6] As stated by John Drane in the book, *Introducing the Bible* "the underlying meaning of the Hebrew word conventionally translated 'law' (Torah) is 'guidance or instruction.'"[7]

Matthew Henry, in the *Commentary on the Whole Bible* speaks to the religious education of children and comments that communicating knowledge purposely will increase their understanding.[8] Gordon J. McConnville, in the article "Deuteronomy: Torah for the Church of Christ" says, "Although Deuteronomy affirms the necessity of divine grace, it functions, rhetorically speaking, as instruction and exhortation. The law code and exhortation remain central. As 'Torah' Deuteronomy has as its aim to form and build up a community living in faith and righteousness, and thereby offering the world a witness by concerning the Kingdom of God.[9] John Drane, in the book *Introducing the Bible*, says "Deuteronomy and the previous four books of the Bible are special in

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[6] "Pentateuch," *Nelson's New Illustrated Dictionary Bible* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers), 962-63.

[7] John Drane. *Introducing the Bible*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011), 33.

[8] Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible* (Grand Rapids:Zondervan Publishing House, 1961), 182.

[9] Gordon J. McConnville, "Deuteronomy: Torah for the Church of Christ," in *European Journal of Theology* 9, (2000): 33-47, Old Testament Abstracts, accessed April 12, 2012, eBooks on EBSCOhost.

importance because they were traditionally regarded as the work of Moses and therefore the foundational documents for the nation's self-understanding."[10] Further, *Nelson's* states "from the time it was written, the Pentateuch was consistently accepted as the work of Moses."[11]

T. D. Alexander writes, "During the past two centuries the quest to identify the author the Pentateuch has become one of the most complex and provocative issues in biblical studies. For some, to doubt the long-standing tradition of Mosaic authorship is the greatest heresy. For others, to support unquestioningly the belief that Moses wrote the whole Pentateuch is the hallmark of blind, uncritical thinking."[12]

In addition, *Nelson's* says, "Many liberal scholars theorize that Deuteronomy was written several centuries after Moses' time by an unknown author who wanted to bring about the religious reforms of the nation of Judah under King Josiah. . . . The logical conclusion is that Moses wrote the first 33 chapters of the book. Chapter 34, about his death, probably was added by his successor Joshua as a tribute to Moses."[13]

In the midst of the authorship controversy, The *Interpreter's Bible* offers the following insight:

> At the conclusion of Numbers, the long wandering of the children of Israel is at an end [the death of Moses], their first success in conquest has been achieved, and they stand at the threshold of the Promised Land. . . . It is the only book in the Old Testament which attempts such an exposition, and the means chosen to present it

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[10] Drane, 33.

[11] *Nelson's*, 963.

[12] T. D. Alexander, "Authorship of the Pentateuch," *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 61.

[13] *Nelson's*, 351.

> is to envisage Moses speaking to his people before his death. . . . According to, Jesus at the threshold of his ministry answered the tempter by quoting three passages from Deuteronomy: 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God;' 'You shall not tempt the Lord your God;' 'You shall worship the Lord your God, and him only shall you serve.'[14]

The Israelites, God's chosen family, were rich with stories of their journey. There were years of enslavement in Egypt; the Passover, and how God, with Moses as their guide, released them; the Commandments, and their 40-years in the wilderness as they completed their journey toward the "Promised Land." John Walton, in the *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary* provides not only a historical background of detailed stipulations, but it also includes anatomical interpretation of Deuteronomy 6:3-7. It begins with verse three and references the "land flowing with milk and honey." It states, "This hyperbolic metaphorical phrase stresses both the richness of Canaan and the special favor God has bestowed on it as its dwelling place for his people."[15]

Paul Tillich, in his book, *Systematic Theology* writes, "Israel is 'in the world' (Canaan) but not 'of the world' (Canaanite). The theological accent point is what is called in Christian Theology 'ecclesiology,' a sense of the community that must always be redefined in terms of its origin, purpose, and destiny. The 'land may then be understood as a hope for the promised well-being that comes to be called [the] 'Kingdom of God.' In Deuteronomy, Israel is not yet in the land. It is on the way there."[16] Ronald Byars suggests that the biblical author, Moses, be taken in context. His concern is that this people, a people chosen by God to be a blessing to all humankind is too easily distracted

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[14] "Introduction," in *The Interpreter's Bible*, vol. 2 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1953), 311.

[15] *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary,* John H. Walton, ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 456.

[16] Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology,* vol. 1 (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1951), 34.

by prosperity, by alternate gods, by illusions of power.[17] They needed to have a firm belief and love for God alone prior to their move into Canaan. As God's chosen people, they had a story to tell; a story that needed telling to their children, and future descendants.

The stories were important to illustrate as they provided principles of justice and the intentions of living the life that God had instructed, and also to reveal the consequences of following other practices.[18] Faith in God is important, not theoretical: it is a matter of experiencing God's justice and generosity and then living out the same values in real life.[19] The advocates for Moses as the author of Deuteronomy, perhaps, felt no one else was qualified to tell the story, including the place of their origin, God's Promise, and their destiny; that no one else knew the history that needed to be taught for present and future generations.

As the Bible shows God's desire for teaching and learning in the biblical times, God's desire for teaching and learning continues today. In this chapter, the writer establishes the biblical foundation that supports the need to teach God's Word through Sunday school. It shows how the acquisition of God's instruction greatly impacts children. Moses, through the Book of Deuteronomy, was given the authority and responsibility to deliver God's instructions.

According to the *International Inductive Study Bible*, the Book of Deuteronomy is the crown jewel of the Pentateuch, and clearly defines what God expects from those who

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[17] Ronald P. Byers, "Deuteronomy 6:1-15," *Interpretation* 60, (2006): 194-196, Old Testament Abstracts, accessed April 12, 2012, eBooks on EBSCOhost.

[18] Drane, 33.

[19] Ibid.

have been redeemed: a life of uncompromising obedience.[20] The Book of Deuteronomy details Moses' leadership as the Israelites had been delivered from the hand of Pharaoh. It is also the beginning of God establishing a covenant with the Israelites by providing instructions on how to live in the land in which the God of their Fathers had given them.[21] Thus the more befitting scripture would be found in Deuteronomy 6:1-7, stated as follows:

> Now this is the commandment–the statutes and the ordinances–that the Lord your God charged me to teach you to observe in the land that you are about to cross into and occupy, so that you and your children and your children's children may fear the Lord your God all the days of your life, and keep all his decrees and his commandments that I am commanding you, so that your days may be long. Hear therefore, O Israel, and observe them diligently, so that it may go well with you, and so that you may multiply greatly in a land flowing with milk and honey, as the Lord, the God of your ancestors, has promised you. Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise.

This text speaks clearly about Moses imparting instructions to God's chosen family with specific directives to parents about what and how to teach their children. It details the commandment to love God first and foremost while understanding the benefits and importance of following this law. Frank Charles Thompson, in the book *The Thompson Chain-Reference Study Bible* informs that in Deuteronomy 6, "Moses exhorts Israel to hear God, and to keep His commandments, which consist loving Him with all

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[20] K. Arthur, *The International Inductive Study Bible* (Eugene, Oregon: Harvest House Publishers, 1993), 289.

[21] Ibid., 289.

the heart."[22] The introduction of this text begins with emphasis on the Law. In reference to the Law, Drane states that the Torah and its development closely bind with the stories of Israel's history because the answers to fundamental questions of life were learned through the experiences of a nation over many generations.[23]

F. F. Bruce, in *The New International Bible Commentary* says, "In this exhortation, reference is made to the commandment (a fresh word; *miswah,* meaning 'charge,' a formal injunction) Moses is about to give expressed in the diverse laws of the covenant."[24] Drane states that the "law" of the Hebrew Bible was the place where people could discover what to believe about God and how they should live in order to reflect God's will.[25]

Matthew Henry's *Commentary* explains the view of Deuteronomy 6:1-7 with the main principle: "Thou shalt love the Lord, thy God with all thy heart."[26] In verse one, Moses is commanded or directed by God to teach the first law which is to love God with all the heart. This law is important for the Israelites as they will be crossing over into another land. The law is to be observed and obeyed. Verse two informs that in obedience to God and fearing Him, in love, will prolong their living. This law is to be passed down from Moses to the fathers, sons and grandsons. This commandment is made to set

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[22] Frank Charles Thompson, *The Thompson Chain-Reference Study Bible* (Indianapolis, IN: B. B. Kirkbride Bible Company, Inc., 1997), 263.

[23] Drane, 33.

[24] F. F. Bruce, ed., *The New International Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979), 263.

[25] Drane, 33.

[26] Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible* (Grand Rapids:Zondervan Publishing House, 1961), 182.

longevity for generations to come as they dwell in the new land-The Promised Land. Verse three clearly defines the urgency of obedience to the law, that Israel is to be "careful to observe" it. In doing so, God's promises that family will be multiplied because of the action taken to obey God's commandment. In verse four, Moses details the expectation and results of obedience as these verses are in preparation for the deliverance of God's commandment. John H. Walton, in the Zondervan Illustrated Bible Background Commentary summarizes that commandment: "The Lord is one. This uniqueness of Yahweh is diametrically opposed to the multiplicity of gods in Canaan."[27]

F. F. Bruce says the verses known as "The Great Commandment (4-9) are known as the *Shema* and are recited daily.[28] Walton says "The four words (Yahweh, our God, Yahweh, One) may be translated into various ways but emphasize that Israel's God was not one of a pantheon, but sovereign and the object of entire devotion."[29] As affirmed by Bruce, "Yahweh is the one and only God, not one God of many."[30] He says, in "Love the Lord God with all your heart, God commands to love him demands a single-minded love, a heart focused and centered on him alone as God. The concept of the heart is central to the theological anthropology of the ancient Near East."[31]

Verses four through six brings the law to direct attention, not only to be heard but instilled in the hearts of all as it states: Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.

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[27] Walton, 456.

[28] Bruce, 263.

[29] Walton, 456.

[30] Bruce, 263.

[31] Ibid.

This law is important for the Israelites as they enter into a land of an unknown culture, characteristics, and unforeseen challenges. This law, enforced with knowledge and active obedience, will equip them as they enter into the new land. Furthermore, in verse seven, this law is to be impressed upon, or deliberately taught to the children because it is the parental duty and responsibility for sustaining the family structure. This verse is deliberate in educating youth. Children are to be instructed and directed with loving boundaries so that as they mature into adulthood, they too will know God and understand that there is only one God. As these children grow into adulthood, and have children of their own, it will be their responsibility as parents to teach their children the same law.

In verse 5, the commentary continues to interpret the word 'love' as it is written in the scripture. Bruce says, "this transforms disobedience from legalism into an expression of personal commitment."[32] Bruce further states, "For Hebrew thought, the heart is the center of human being, including understanding and will as well as emotions."[33] Lastly, the commentary interprets these verses to mean the following: "This total demand must never be overlooked. Not only is it to be upon the heart, it must first take place in training children, in conversation (at home and[34] outside) from beginning to the end of the day; it should govern the senses, control behavior and direct life in the home and community."

Verses four through seven of chapter six are significant because they emphasize that parents are to teach their children of God's commandments on a daily basis. God expects parents to make their homes God fearing, but in a loving way. The way that

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[32] Bruce, 263.

[33] Ibid., 264.

[34] Ibid.

shows God is merciful and kind. These guidelines are expected to be taught by using God's Word. It is believed that by doing so, blessings will follow because of the obedience of carrying out the responsibilities given. Many practical lessons are found in the Bible and are effective in teaching and learning when the home is God fearing, respectful and loving.

The Life Application Study Bible summarizes verses seven through nine by stating the Hebrew's success in making religion an "integral" part of life.[35] The success came from life-oriented religious education as opposed to information driven education.[36] The underlying and important lesson to learn is that parents are to teach children in the way they should live and not make the same mistakes as they or previous ancestors did. The use of practical daily living by example, according to God's commandments, and the pursuit of diligence in using everyday experiences for instruction provides children the tools they need to survive as they grow older. Thus, Deuteronomy's story is framed for children so that the character of their God will never be forgotten, i.e., a God who is generous and merciful but not forgetful.[37]

The commentary includes the interpretation of maintaining and keeping up of religion in our hearts and houses that it might not go wither or decay.[38] Matthew continues in stating that in loving God is to know Him, and therefore love him as to those

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[35] *The Life Application Study Bible*: *New International Version* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishers, 2005), 263.

[36] Ibid.

[37] Ronald P. Byers, "Deuteronomy 6:1-15," *Interpretation* 60, (2006): 194-196, Old Testament Abstracts, accessed April 12, 2012, eBooks on EBSCOhost.

[38] Henry, 182.

that see good cause to love him.[39] Continuing, the interpretation suggests not to teach matters of doubtful disputation or unrevealed mysteries, but by communicating the truth and laws of God.[40] John Walton addresses those truths in his reference to "Upon your hearts" (6:6), emphasizing that the "Heart in the sense of reason and cognitive functions is by far the most important bodily organ mentioned in the Old Testament."[41] He says "The heart is paired with the tongue and controls the limbs. The tongue repeats what the heart formulates, while the heart gathers information from all other senses."[42] And finally, he turns attention to "Impress them on your children" (6:7), saying "The inculcation of moral principles and wisdom in youth is practiced widely in the ancient Near East."[43]

Overall, the urgency rests on teaching, which involves conversation. Henry, throughout his writings on the text emphasizes the tool of teaching and conversation. In his opinion, the more conversing that is taking place will bring about admiration and prove to be more influential in children. He reminds his readers of the concrete aspect of learning as quoted in the Bible, to write the commandments on the walls, around doorposts, and wear the parchment on the wrists.[44]

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[39] Henry, 182.

[40] Ibid.

[41] Walton, 457.

[42] Ibid.

[43] Walton, 457.

[44] Henry, 182.

New Testament

In the first commandment, God gives the teaching to love Him, and to love only Him. Jesus came to give the same commandment of His Father as it resonates throughout the New Testament in the four Gospels. It is the view of this writer that in both cases, regardless of the age of the hearers, they were all considered children of God. As children, they were all in need of instructions and teachings. Therefore, as expressed by Patrick Miller, as God understood and responded to the needs of His children, it is the role, duty, and humbling responsibility that parents are to provide the same parameters for their children. God always begins with the end in mind. For the oneness of the reality that grounds our existence, i.e., God is that which keeps our lives from being chaotic and divided beyond the limits of human management.[45]

It is the understanding of the writer that internalizing Scripture is vital for church families as this speaks to the interaction of one another in their homes and church environment. This writer sees the importance of this because the root of all learning begins first and foremost in the home. Titus is a reminder that families have an obligation and duty to teach that Christian behavior, which is to be demonstrated along with verbal teachings.

Lee Vukich and Steve Vandergriff, in the book *Timeless Youth Ministry* states "teaching means different things to different people."[46] Even though the interpretation may vary, the letter to Titus speaks to the need for the sound teachings of God to begin in

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[45] Patrick D. Miller, "The Most Important Word: The Yoke of the Kingdom," *Iliff Review* 41, no. 3 (September 1, 1984): 17-29, ATLASerials, Religion Collection, accessed April 29, 2012, eBooks on EBSCOhost.

[46] Lee Vukich and Steve Vandegriff, *Timeless Youth Ministry* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 2002), 269.

the home so that when children grow up and become members of society, they have the foundation to survive based upon the principles of God as their behavioral example.

Jouette Bassler, in the *Abingdon New Testament Commentaries*, in response to the importance of teachings in Titus wrote, "The instructions have the added benefit of strengthening the social fabric of the church at a time when 'many' were undermining it with their message promoting a celibate life."[47] According to the *Life Application Study Bible*, the Apostle Paul was the teacher and mentor of Titus, who was of Grecian ethnicity and had been converted to Christianity.[48]

George Montague, in the *Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture* provides insightful background information about the raw condition of the Church in Crete, which he says was made up largely of recent converts who have come from a life infected by loose morals of the surrounding culture.[49]

Paul Zehr writes that "the salutation to Titus–one long, sixty five word sentence–is the longest of the letters to Timothy and Titus."[50] Whereas most historians cites Paul as the author, Larry Waters says, "The Pastoral Epistles present difficult questions for the modern interpreter, including such matters as their authorship, literary characteristics, and social orientations. Collins, professor of New Testament at the Catholic University of America, depends heavily on Jewish and Hellenistic backgrounds in his interpretations of

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[47] Jouette M. Bassler, *Abingdon New Testament Commentaries* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1996), 197.

[48] *Life Application Study Bible,* 2053.

[49] George T. Montague, *The Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing Group, 2008), 228.

[50] Paul M. Zehr, *Believers Church Bible Commentary: 1 & 2 Timothy Titus* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 2010), 240.

various passages. He summarizes topics of importance throughout these three letters under excursuses on church leadership, women, church order, and the conduct of Christians in the world."[51]

As far as the authorship of this letter, *Matthew Henry's Commentary* says that Paul is the author, and refers to the relationship between Paul and Titus. . . . He gives special emphasis to the way Paul introduces Titus, calling Titus his "son," his brother and fellow helper.[52] This book begins with Paul writing an epistle, or letter, to Titus detailing his duties of supervisor of the churches on the island of Crete.[53] Zehr says, "As with the standard form of secular letter writing in the ancient world, the salutation contains the sender's name, the name of the person addressed, and a greeting. Paul expands all three parts to set forth his authority as the main author of this epistle, to identify the Christian character of the recipients, and to emphasize the Christian nature of the greeting."[54]

Montague notes that "Paul's concern is to shore up and stabilize the lives of families, the building blocks of the Church."[55] On the other hand, Zehr, with the opinion that Paul was providing direct expectations for church leaders says, "Paul is responding to the traditional house code and adjusting it on the bases of Christian principles. Elaborating on household behavior, Paul talks about the church as an alternative

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[51] Larry J. Waters, "1 & 2 Timothy and Titus: A Commentary," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 162, no. 646 (April 1, 2005): 247-249, ATLASerials, Religion Collection, accessed April 22, 2012, eBooks on EBSCOhost.

[52] Matthew Henry, 1900.

[53] *Life Application Bible,* 2053.

[54] Zehr, 240.

[55] Montague, 229.

community and deals with its relationship to government and to persons outside the church in the Cretan culture."[56]

J. W. Marshall, in his critique, offers the thought that the technique of the pseudonymous letter is to bridge surreptitiously (underhandedly?) the gap between the fiction it tells and the historical situation in which it seeks to have an effect.[57] The writer of the article poses three questions about the Book of Titus thus asking: "What is the relationship between (1) the pseudonymity of the letter to Titus, (2) the narrative of interaction between 'Paul' and 'Titus' that the letter implies, and (3) the social structures of hierarchy that the letter sets up? To put it another way: What happens when the author writes and the audience hear the words 'I left you in Crete'–especially if neither has ever been there?[58]

Grant R. Osborne questions the idea or implication of what actions are to be carried out within the given context of Crete and the churches during that specific time. The appointment given to Titus was difficult because: 1) Titus would have to compete with a tradition of competition between cities, and 2) the island had been subdued by the Romans, which the Cretans disliked.[59] Bassler notes that the author wedges the description of the rebellious people between two counterparts of loyal behavior; the

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[56] Zehr, 262.

[57] J. W. Marshall, "'I Left You in Crete: Narrative Deception and Social Hierarchy in the Letter to Titus," *Journal Of Biblical Literature* 127, no. 4 (2008): 781-803, New Testament Abstracts, accessed April 17, 2012, eBooks on EBSCOhost.

[58] Ibid.

[59] Grant R. Osborne, Series Editor, Virtual United Website IPreach, Abingdon New Testament Commentaries, Titus 2:3-5 (accessed April 8, 2012).

bishop, who is faithful to the church's teaching, and Titus, who declares "teach" what is consistent with sound doctrine.[60]

Lee Vukich and Steve Vandegriff, in *Webster's Classic Reference Dictionary* seem to direct attention to the teaching aspect of the letter as a means "to communicate skill or knowledge; to give instruction or insight."[61] In the letter, Titus has the responsibility to inform the church leaders on how to carry forth sound doctrine, and reiterate responsibilities of authority in leadership positions. Those words of instructions and insight are the focus in the selected text of Titus 2:1-7:

> You, however, must teach what is appropriate to sound doctrine. Teach the older men to be temperate, worthy of respect, self-controlled, and sound in faith, in love and in endurance. Likewise, teach the older women to be reverent in the way they live, not to be slanderers or addicted to much wine, but to teach what is good. Then they can urge the younger women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled and pure, to be busy at home, to be kind, and to be subject to their husbands, so that no one will malign the word of God. Similarly, encourage the young men to be self-controlled. In everything set them an example by doing what is good.

Walter L. Liefield, in *The NIV Application Commentary* states "the command that opens chapter two, 'You must teach what is in accord with sound doctrine' indicates that what follows will deal specifically with the expectation, characteristic of the Pastoral Letters, that those who embrace the true faith will demonstrate a certain type of behavior in their lives.[62]

Drane, in his interpretation of that doctrine says Titus and Timothy were being encouraged by Paul to reaffirm the basic elements of true Christian faith, especially by

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[60] Bassler, 193

[61] Lee Vukich and Steve Vandegriff, 269.

[62] Walter L. Liefield, *The NIV Application Commentary 1 & 2 Timothy/ Titus* (Grand Rapids, MI. Zondervan, 1999), 326.

opposing the fact that God does not care about the world we live in.[63] He says that doctrine was to be reiterated that Jesus himself came down to earth in human form, and demonstrated God's love through his birth, crucifixion and resurrection. This is the essence of salvation in humble acceptance of God's love and Christians are to show it by the ways they live through the words of Jesus Christ.[64] Liefeld argues that the sound doctrine of the gospel is not mere intellectual truth; it affects the very structure of the relationships in the home as well as the Church.[65]

The responsibility to teach this sound doctrine is explained in *The Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture* which says, "In the Christian community, sobriety in the older men is important because of their roles as examples and leaders of the household and also because it would normally be from them that the presbyters, or elders, of the church would be chosen.[66] Titus, based on the expectations of Paul, was appointed to spearhead this assignment. Paul also provides Titus with the characteristics elders should possess; such as the behaviors they exhibit in their homes, jobs and within personal relationships.

This message is also found in *The Collegeville Bible Commentary,* which states "In chiastic form, older men, older women, young women, and young men are addressed. They are called upon to be good family examples, self-controlled, steadfast, and loving."[67] Zehr stresses that "Paul attends to three major themes. First is the importance

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[63] Drane, 569.

[64] Ibid.

[65] Liefeld, 327.

[66] Montague, 229.

[67] Neyrey, 41.

of self-control, which Paul applies to older men, older women, younger women, and to younger men, Second, Paul emphasizes the need for spiritual health. Titus is to teach healthy doctrine, older men are to be healthy in faith, and Titus is to make use of healthy speech that cannot be condemned by an opponent. Third, several purpose or result clauses appear (introduced by the Greek conjunction, *hina*), indicating the mission effect of upright living upon the pagan Cretans."[68]

Jerry Falwell, however, in *The Liberty Commentary on the New Testament* says "aged men are not necessarily elders, but men who are older in years. Furthermore, the word 'sober' is explained to mean sober-minded, or sincere; Temperate means 'to curb one's desires or impulses,' and Sound, the familiar word meaning healthy."[69] The observations by Falwell appear to affirm that Paul stresses to Titus the seriousness of teaching adults to be mindful of their actions as others are critically watching the behaviors that are not exemplary of Christ. The purpose of this instruction is not just for the elders to preach and or teach, but to be morally sound examples; disciplined and committed while exhibiting visible Christian characteristics.

Drane connects this theme to the ancient world, whereby behavior was taught "so that no one will speak evil of the message that comes from God."[70] This verse speaks to the fact that God has already established rules on how people should live. Daily living that is ungodly causes room for ridicule and invalidating God's Word. In his book, Drane writes that the theme of Christian behavior reoccurs throughout the three letters of Titus.

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[68] Zehr, 262-263

[69] Falwell, 634.

[70] Drane, 569.

He notes that Titus 2:1-5 spell out in more detail how Christians ought to behave in relation to the family.[71] Verses two and three directly instruct the older men and women, likewise to be temperate, self-controlled and sound in faith.

The importance of these exhortations lies not in the list of virtues or vices, which are rather obvious, but in the sense of the public face, the new religion must have.[72] Bassler argues, "The lists of desired and prescribed behavior in chapter 2 resemble in many ways the material in 1:5-9, but here they are presented under the rubric of general ethical instructions (to be passed on to the appropriate groups) rather than qualifications for church leadership positions. The basic categories for the instructions are age groups within the church, but elements of another framework derived from the household management tradition can also be discerned."[73]

As Paul speaks to his concern to teach men, he does likewise with the teaching of women, both young and old. Zehr says, "The major goal of this teaching is to prevent younger married women from flighty, careless living that would attract criticism against Christianity. Older women are to teach younger women upright living so that no opponent can find reason for discrediting the word of God.[74] As expressed by Bassler,

> Since the proper behavior of the younger women is presented as a subordinate clause of the instruction to older women–that is, as the desired result of *their* teaching–the pattern of parallel instructions to different as groups is broken, focusing attention somewhat on interruption. Unlike the instructions for the older age groups, the ones to young women are specific into their situation and this, together with the substantial length of these instructions, suggests particular

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[71] Ibid.

[72] Neyrey, 41.

[73] Jouette M. Bassler, *Abingdon New Testament Commentaries* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1996), 192.

[74] Zehr, 265.

> interest in this group. Indeed it seems likely that the disruption the opponents were causing was particularly acute in families of young matron, leading the author to focus his comments concerning these women on issues that strengthen the family structure.[75]

Bassler goes on to explain that "young women are to behave in the prescribed manner so that the word of God may not be discredited. The author's concern was that public disapproval of Christian women who did not behave accordingly to the norms of Greco-Roman society would undermine the church's fundamental work of proclaiming the gospel to that society."[76] The examples of the younger women, no doubt, were to be learned from the older women who were "exhorted, for example not simply to the modest and decent behavior expected of all Greco-Roman women, but to the reverent behavior appropriate to holy persons. This word does not imply that the women had priestly function in the church; indeed, it connotes no more than the holy behavior expected of all believers. The author's primary purpose in using this striking word in this context was to draw as sharp a distinction as possible between the behavior of Christian women and the defiled and loathsome lives of the rebellious teachers."[77]

The responsibility of older women is noted by Falwell who states "Christian matrons have a responsibility to give their years of experience to the younger women and they are the best teachers."[78] As summarized by Grant R. Osborne, these teachings must not only be just for doing works in the church but should be carried in the daily lives of all believers. Everyone must hold stake in being righteous for Christ and it was the duty

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[75] Bassler, 195.

[76] Ibid., 197.

[77] Bassler, 193-194.

[78] Falwell, 634.

of the elders to teach the younger generation these valuable life lessons. When adversity strikes, it is the belief that with age, wisdom and experience should impart. The people who have experienced life are able to help those who are younger possibly avoid unnecessary mistakes and trials that life can bring.[79]

This writer understands that throughout this text, Paul needs Titus to teach the importance of learning and living out the doctrine of God, which is vital to the survival of society. These sacred yet important values should be passed along in the spirit of sharing for generations to come. Zehr explains how "these teachings emphasize the behavioral side of the gospel, sound or healthy doctrine includes ethical principles. These ethical principles affect the everyday life of the Christian household and have a direct bearing on relationships between various groups and on the moral character of individuals within each age group. As Titus teaches healthy doctrine, people in the Christian churches will grow in Christian faith and life."[80]

Bassler says the author "urges behavior that reinforces the traditional family structure to counter both the impact of the opponents teaching and the destabilizing legacy of Paul's own message."[81] Drane explains: "According to the epistles of Paul and his concerns, he addresses Christian leadership. Simply stated, even as fathers and mothers are to lead their children by example, so should the Christian leaders of the Church. They should uphold the same Christ like characteristic and be dutiful in demonstrating them as motivation for others. People in authoritative positions are to be

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[79] Grant R. Osborne, ed., Virtual United Website IPreach, Abingdon New Testament Commentaries, Titus 2 (accessed April 8, 2012).

[80] Zehr, 263.

[81] Bassler, 196.

held accountable to the standards established by having courage in the truth of the Gospel, not believing in their own opinions but solely being firm on God's own purposes.[82]

K. Arthur says "it is evident that the world's lifestyle denies, in many cases, what God has established for humankind."[83] As the writer studies this text, in her opinion, the main idea is that elders and leaders are to lead by example. The elders have a responsibility to the community of young adults in providing the characteristics of Christ as God had ordained beginning with loving God first and foremost. This is the foundation to Christian education and it is to begin at home. As Bassler states, "Fundamental to the logic of these letters is the conviction that good behavior flows from sound doctrine, while deviation can only produce moral disaster and social disorder. The author chooses to engage the issue first at the level of behavior."[84]

Therefore, the role of those in authority are to make sure the generations to come have the same opportunities to learn about God and salvation through His son Jesus. Value should be taught verbally with the expectation of some kind of demonstrative example to follow. It is imperative that future generations know the consequences that of boundaries when they are not respected.

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[82] Drane, 569.

[83] K. Arthur, and the Staff of Precept Ministries, 1966.

[84] Bassler, 193.

Theological Foundation

For Christians, the Bible should be the foundation for practical faith. That sacred book is the source to learn about God, and how God reveals things that help us learn and grow in our faith, either by nature, experience or historic events. Faith, in the view of the writer, is an evolution from what we learn, our feelings and emotional being. As Christians, including our youth, we are called to witness through words and actions the source of that learning, knowledge–our feelings and emotional being. All Christians are called to witness about our understanding of God, which is known as our theology.

Forest E. Harris, in the book *Ministry for Social Change*, in offering a practical and functional definition of theology and what it means for the people of God says, "Theology is the process of reflecting upon God's involvement in human life. Although as academic discipline, it is also the way any person appropriates the faith. In a real sense, all of us are theologians, for theology is the only way that reason and faith embrace each other. Every Christian is a theologian!"[85]

This writer feels that since youth have their own theology, the church should evaluate appropriate action to incorporate youth into the life of the ministry. It is necessary to understand that theology is not a new concept for youth; it is interpreted in ways that challenges the mainstream of adult thought and theology. Thus, it is vital for the church to realize and embrace the reality that youth have own interpretations of god and/or the gods in their lives, and the church must we willing to incorporate the theology of the youth in to the life of the ministry.

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[85] Forest E. Harris, Sr., *Ministry for Social Change: Theology and Praxis in the Black Church Tradition* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1993), 118.

Harris says "it is our duty, as faithful believers, to do theology. To do theology means to make an effort to understand, declare and to live out who God is, what God demands, and what God is doing now for our salvation. Then, in light of that theology, that is the knowledge of ourselves, God, and the world, we must respond in faith, love, and obedience. Theology in this sense is the work of the whole church and the individual member of every congregation."[86] As the church seeks to understand the theology, the writer feels that it is important to gain a deeper understanding of what theology means to everyone.

Tyron Inbody, in his book *The Faith of the Christian Church* says "Theology is the Christian faith subjected to critical thought."[87] The book, *Is God Necessary*, written by Larry Richards explains how others may view God by writing, "This is one of the biggest problems we have when we begin to face those intangibles that point us toward God. Do we want to go one? Take the risk? A look inside ourselves might suggest that God is real. And that He's left his footprints all across our personalities. But those footprints aren't God. Seeing them doesn't tell us much about Him. We've all got a lot if mixed-up ideas about God."[88] When we look at the things that happen to us, we can get a lot of different ideas of what God might be like. Even if evidence "in here" points to a real God "our there" we still have to struggle of what "God" might be like."[89] It is the

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[86] Ibid., 118.

[87] Tyron Inbody, *The Faith of the Christian Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2005), 14.

[88] Larry Richards, *Is God Necessary* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1969), 47.

[89] Ibid., 45.

belief of the writer that youth are influenced by actions of others, from whom they gain their own theology.

Ivy Beckwith, author of *Postmodern Children's Ministry* writes "God has given children an innate ability to know and love God. Children are strongly attracted to God from birth. This is a quality that needs to be nurtured from birth onward, both at home and in the faith community."[90] Based on this commentary, the writer submits that there are circumstances that foster doubt, and infiltrate the minds of youth who wonder who God is and His relevancy, despite meaning and knowledge given to them from God.

As children develop into teens, experiences become more meaningful to them; their views about God and His promises. It is the understanding of the writer that youth experience doubt about their theology and God, and have conjured some unhealthy opinions about God, which consists of an unhealthy theology. For instance, youth, as well as adults, their theological views are skewed with images of money, clothing, sex, drugs, music, electronics, power and money.

Larry Richards, after asking a number of teens to give their image of God, commented how their images were interesting. The most common were:

1) The Rule Maker God–According to this picture the rule making God spends most of His time observing to see what's fun for us and then making rules against it. To lots of kids, God could be replaced by a Stop sign.

2) The Policeman God–According to this image, God is always running around waiting to blow the whistle and club you. His main interest is sin and He likes nothing more than to observe a juicy one and write you up a ticket on it. When He is off duty, God will remind you what you have done and make you feel guilty. He really gets a kick out of that.

3) The Sissy God–This God is a rather doddering Grandfather, a kind of old Being, "who helps people who are in trouble and comforts old people when they are

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[90] Ivy Beckwith, *Postmodern Children's Ministry: Ministry to Children in the 21st Century* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004), 63

about to die." He is a rather popular God and very concerned about public opinion polls. One of the reasons He is popular is because he never bothers anyone. He's got all the character of a marshmallow.

4) The Merchant God–This God is all business. He sits there keeping a sharp set of books and weighing all your acts on a scale. And buddy, you better keep on the credits side of His ledger.

5) The Sovereign Tyrant–This God struts around His private palace grounds and all us peons have to fall flat on our faces anytime His shadow is within ten miles. Sometimes for His amusement, He sets up a chessboard and plays games with our lives.

6) The Force–This God is a very distant, very impersonal 'it.' The main thing about this god is His un-humanity. He is not even human. He is not even inhuman. He is so different, so 'far out' that we can't even talk meaningfully about Him."[91]

Andrew Root and Kenda Creasy Dean, authors of *The Theological Turn in Youth Ministry* discuss theological credibility as it relates to children, which led to them saying "By now, American Christianity's well-intentioned impotence with young people has been analyzed to death, scattering blame on everything from budget cuts to training deficits to demographic cycles."[92] They continue saying, "Beneath these issues, however, lies the question of theological credibility: does the God presented by American churches pacify adolescents with pizza and youth groups, or does God satisfy their deepest longings to deliver them from their most profound dreads? If nothing else, the events of the last ten years force us to repack our theological gear for youth ministry, beginning with a doctrine of salvation in which human development and divine action intersect."[93]

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[91] Richards, *Is God Necessary,* 49-50.

[92] Andrew Root and Kenda Creasy Dean, *The Theological Turn in Youth Ministry* (Downers Grove IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 64-65.

[93] Ibid.

In another work, *A Theology of Christian Education*, Richards comments "If Bible truths are treated by us as beliefs and be accepted intellectually, but without affective or conative (decisional) meaning, then the child will tend to perceive and integrate these concepts into his growing personality in the same way."[94] In the earlier interviews teens, Richards, after evaluating their theology and perceptions of God, argues their reasoning is unhealthy for the following reasons:

1) One way we know these images are wrong is by noting that we don't know where these images came from. They are hangovers from childhood.

2) Another way we know these images of God are false is by noting that each of them is "mean"–belittling. These are characteristics we dislike in people.

3) This just can't be, because we have already shown that this is a moral universe. Somehow there is implanted in us an idea of right, of good. And if we are right in thinking that it's God who has made us moral beings, He simply wouldn't be immoral Himself.[95]

Richards also understood the need of youth to learn about the theology of God early in life. He writes, "Scripture must be communicated as a lived and livable reality. Its truths must be communicated by those who have integrated them into their personalities and who, in the shared experiences of life, talk of the Word and the words of God with their children. The Critical location for Bible teaching is not in the classroom but rather in the household."[96]

Samuel Proctor, author of *Preaching About Crisis in the Community*, informs that '"God gave us a moral model in Jesus Christ." So while there may be confusion about our values, this confusion is allayed and dissipated when we lift up the person and

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[94] Larry Richards, *A Theology of Christian Education* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan), 193.

[95] Richards, *Is God Necessary*, 51-52.

[96] Richards, *A Theology of Christian Education*, 193.

message of Jesus Christ"[97] Proctor further writes, "Jesus demonstrated simplicity, trustworthiness, honesty, and truthfulness, as well *as* compassion, tenderness and love with initiative."[98]

Richards, in an interview with a teen told of her comments on the view of Christianity by her peers. The teen said "Most kids think Christianity is a set of don'ts. They doubt if there is any real value in it since they see adults breaking these don'ts, and nullifying their own religion"[99] In another interview by Richards, the teen said "Doubts in my life arise when I see other people, who aren't Christians, seemingly having more fun in life and are really outstanding people. They seem to be having full lives without Christ. So maybe it's not necessary to have Christ at all."[100] Richards further notes, "But daily life is experienced, and not just observed. Sometimes guys and girls have reason to wonder where God is in their own lives."[101]

Samuel Proctor writes "At the source of much of our moral concern is the fact that our generation seems to be hypnotized by materialism and consumerism. Our appetites are whetted by our obsession with a growth economy, sustained by incessant advertising. Our understanding of adequacy is luxury, and success is therefore ceaseless acquisition. Satisfaction becomes tantamount to wealth and the life of abundance."[102]

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[97] Samuel Proctor, *Preaching About Crisis in the Community* (Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1988), 33.

[98] Ibid., 41.

[99] Richards, *Is God Necessary*, 48.

[100] Ibid., 6.

[101] Ibid., 7.

[102] Proctor, 61.

Richards speaks to the value of the home setting for theological nurturing and edification of family structures by stating the importance of parental roles. In the opinion of the writer, parents should serve as a model for faith and life. Richards says,

- Parents should accept responsibility for the Christian nurture of their own children.
- Parents should be helped to develop a relationship with their children which facilitate the communication of faith-as-life.
- Communicative encounters between parents and children should be structured.
- Experiences of faith-as-life which parents and children can share and discuss should be suggested.[103]

Ivy Beckwith, speaking on the subject of the family says, "Family is everything to a child. Family is the first place where a child forms and experiences relationships. It is a child's first place of community."[104] Richards, affirming the values of Beckwith writes, "There is no question that the parents are still the primary socialization agents for young children. This does not mean that they are [or should be] the sole socialization agents. Other adults can be significant in a child's life, including a Christian teacher. At the same time, the role of parent's is primary."[105]

Beckwith continues saying, "Our children need to be told they are Christians and treated as such–invited into rituals and rites of the church, treated as full members of the community, given opportunities to lead in the community and loved as Jesus calls us to love one another as a sign of God's love for the world."[106] Beckwith adds," the family

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[103] Richards, *A Theology of Christian Education*, 215-216.

[104] Beckwith, 101.

[105] Ibid., 194.

[106] Ibid., 63.

provides a child with affirmation of her gifts, abilities, and personality that in turn helps her to see herself as lovable and competent.[107]

Liberation Theology

The foundation of this ministry project is Liberation Theology, which is grounded in the premise that God is a God of the oppressed; that God is concerned with those who are faced with challenges, oppression and social injustices. This working definition provides a good understanding of the manifestation of the God who hears the groans of those in bondage, and comes to deliver them from oppression and calls for them to become involved as agents of their own salvation.[108]

In their book, *Introducing Liberation Theology*, Leonardo Boff and Clodovis Boff write, "Every true theology springs from spirituality–that is, from a true meeting with God in history. Liberation Theology was born when faith confronted the injustice done to the poor. By 'poor' we do not really mean the poor individual who knocks on the door asking for alms. We mean a collective poor. The 'popular classes;' the poor are also the workers exploited by the capitalist system; the under-employed, those pushed aside by the production process."[109]

Liberation Theology is one way to deal with separation between two parties in the church, youth and its impact and change the mindset of the Black Church in the process. Many youth within the African American church have experienced the lack of youth

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[107] Ibid., 110.

[108] Harris, 119.

[109] Leonardo Boff and Clodovis Boff, *Introducing Liberation Theology* (London: Burns & Oates, 1987), 3.

effectiveness. Instead of being an asset to the church, they have become frustrated by status quo traditions that force them to be isolated; separated and not allowed participate as full members of the family of Christ.

If the youth of today are to realize their potential as effective Christians and as productive citizens and good stewards of all that God has given them, this lack of youth effectiveness and participation in the church must change. Substantial theological, biblical, and historical perspectives support the need for and the feasibility of transformation occurring as a result of the teachings and other activities of the collaborative teaching model proposed in this project.

Then too, Gustavo Gutierrez defines Liberation Theology as "a theological reflection based on the Gospel and the experiences of men and women committed to the process of liberation in this oppressed and exploited sub-continent of Latin America. It is a theological reflection born of shared experience in the effort to abolish the present unjust situation and to build a different society, freer and more human."[110] In his book *The Power of the Poor in History*, Gustavo Gutierrez writes:

> From the beginning the theology of liberation had two fundamental insights. Not only did they come first chronologically, but they have continued to form the very backbone of this theology. I am referring to its theological method and its perspective of the poor.
>
> From the beginning, the theology of liberation posited that the first act is involvement in the liberation process, and that theology comes afterward, as a second act. The theological movement is one of critical reflection from within, and upon, concrete historical praxis, in confrontation with the word of the Lord as lived and accepted in faith–a faith that comes to us through manifold, and sometimes ambiguous, historical mediations, but which we are daily remaking and repairing. . . .

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[110] Gustavo Gutierrez, Teologia De La Liberacion, Perspectivas as (Salamanca; Ediciones Sigueme, 1972), 15.

> The second insight of the theology of liberation is its decision to work from the viewpoint of the poor–the exploited classes, marginalized ethnic groups, and scorned cultures. This led it to take up the great themes of poverty and the poor in the Bible. As a result the poor appear within this theology as the key to an understanding of the meaning of liberation and of the meaning of the revelation of a liberating God. This second point, of course, is inseparable from the first. If theology is to be a reflection from within, and upon, praxis it will be important to bear in mind that what is being reflected upon is the praxis of liberation of the oppressed of this world.[111]

James Cone, in a March 23, 2013 lecture to the Eastern Star Church in Indianapolis, identified the oppressed as those who are "politically and economically challenged."[112] Cone, who founded Liberation Theology, and is recognized and respected for his many views on the subject, is often cited by other writers, including Anthony Pinn who wrote:

> Perhaps the most challenging component of Cone's theology revolved around the idea of God as ontologically black. That is to say, God is so strongly identified with the oppressed–best understood in the United States with respect to African Americans that God's being (or identity) becomes synonymous with this group. And, by extension, commitment to God's will as expressed in the Christian faith requires the same sort of strong commitment to the oppressed from all Christians. For the church-based theologians articulating this vision, true Christian conduct had to entail attention to the liberation of oppressed communities and reconciliation between communities based on respect, appreciation, and a biblically inspired recognition of all humanity's creation in the image of God.[113]

Pinn further states, "All theologies arise out of communal experience with God. At this moment in time, the black community seeks to express its theology in language that speaks to the contemporary mood of black people."[114] According to James Cone,

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[111] Gustavo Gutierrez, *The Power of the Poor in History* (London; SCM, 1983), 200-1.

[112] James Cone, Lecture–Eastern Star Church, Indianapolis, IN: March 23, 2013.

[113] Anthony B. Pinn, "Jesus and justice: an outline of liberation theology within Black churches." *Cross Currents* 57, no. 2 (June 1, 2007): 218-226. ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, accessed June 9, 2012, eBooks on EBSCOhost.

[114] Pinn, "Jesus and Justice."

Black theology came from the need of a new perspective–from the people who are at the bottom and not the "top."[115] David Moore says "To be their own people under God, blacks had no alternative but to separate; thus the black church emerged through a theology of liberation."[116] As Christians within the church, there is a definite need to be proactive in the outreach of saving those who are lost. Faith is having a traditional relationship that involves witnessing. Moore, in his emphasis on responding to the needs of the oppressed says blacks were converted to the Christian faith because they found it "hopeful and liberating."[117]

Charles Foster, in his book, *Educating Congregations* writes, "Church education nurtures hope if it equips children, youth, and adults to participate in the congregation's vocation in the world. . . . Education that nurtures hope with young people recognizes them as equal participants in the vocation of their congregation."[118] The absence of that hope often results in youth rejecting the institutional church because they feel that the conventional church is unresponsive to personal and social needs. They regard church attendance as superficial and uninteresting.[119]

Youth, overwhelmed with unhealthy images of theology, and unable to get the needed answers from the established church, are exiting the church in massive numbers. Why are they leaving? Where are they going? And what does this means for the future of

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[115] James Cone, Lecture–Eastern Star Church, Indianapolis, IN: March 23, 2013.

[116] David O. Moore, "The Withdrawal of Blacks from Southern Baptist Churches Following Emancipation," *Baptist History and Heritage* 16, no. 3 (July 1, 1981): 12-18, ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, accessed June 9, 2012, eBooks on EBSCOhost.

[117] Moore, "The Withdrawal of Blacks," 297.

[118] Charles Foster, *Educating Congregations: The Future of Christian Education* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 125.

[119] Moore, 297.

the Church? Using data from many year of research, and adhering to an unwavering biblical perspective, Barna predicts how this revolution will impact the organized church, how Christ's body of believers should react, and how individuals who are considering leaving (or those who have already left) can respond.

The effects of this change are not known. The loss of reliance on moral laws laid down by the Church may have brought greater flexibility and freedom, but also it is likely to have greatly increased the need for young people to establish their own set of values and ideals.[120] Amid their confusion, youth are responding with acts of revolution. A revolution is a fundamental change repudiating apathetic systems and practices of the Christian faith and introducing a wholesale shift in how faith is understood, integrated and influences the world. It represents a paradigm shift in the way a person views and interacts with his or her world. For leaders working for positive change in the church and for believers struggling to find a spiritual community and worship experience that resonates, Revolution is here. Are you ready?[121]

Historical Foundation

Sunday school, for many, is one of the most effective means of maintaining the life of the church. For the most part, it is an established institution that promotes the use of principles to grow a church through evangelism and assimilation. Whereas this concept is present today, Sunday school was born out of the need to educate the poor, the illiterate, and to help transform youth into productive citizens for the future.

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[120] Michael Rutter, *Changing Youth in a Changing Society: Patterns of Adolescent Development and Disorder* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980), 226.

[121] George Barna, *Revolution* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2005), 50.

Today, youth have become less and less interested in Sunday school, which many claim has led to the lack of discipline and other behavior problems. As attendance in Sunday school declines, especially among African American youth, it is imperative for the church to respond with an urgency to reverse this trend. That reversal, in the opinion of this writer, is to provide the church, which includes church leaders, youth and members, with convincing evidence of the value of Sunday school. That evidence includes the significance of the history of Sunday school that has played such a key role in the life of African Americans.

Birthplace and Origin of Sunday Schools

According to several historians, Robert Raikes is considered the founder of Sunday school. However, several reasons are given as the basis for that birth. For instance, Carl Nelson in the article "Has the Sunday school movement played out" says, "In 1780, Sunday school was instituted in the town of Glouster located in England by Robert Raikes. His purpose in starting a Sunday school was to provide general as well as religious education for children of working parents."[122]

On the other hand, Ronnie Prevost and James Reed, in the book *A History of Christian Education* say "Raikes, a newspaper publisher, established his first school in the slum area of Gloucester, England, near a prison; for that's where many people who were employed in a pin factory lived. . . . His immediate concern was for the spiritual

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[122] Carl Ellis Nelson, "Has the Sunday school movement played out," *Austin Seminary Bulletin* (Faculty Ed.) 99, no. 8 (May 1, 1984): 37-44, ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, accessed April 1, 2013, eBooks on EBSCOhost.

welfare of children, but one of his longer range goals was to shape the moral character of future citizens. . . . Another goal of Raikes's school was literacy training."[123]

Yet, as indicated by Prevost, there were greater concerns for children and the poor:

> The working conditions were described as being wretched and most poor families, even the children were forced to work in such conditions. . . . These children had no real childhood much less a public elementary education. . . . Sunday was the only 'free day' for the children at that time which caused problems with them running 'wild' in the streets and often becoming involved in crimes. . . . These circumstances perpetuated the poverty-crime cycle into which these children were born. . . . Raikes felt that education was an effective tool in battling vice and moral degeneration.[124]

Prevost continues his historical discourse saying, "Sunday school in its origin and often in its history showed a concern for the disadvantaged. . . . The Sunday school spread quickly in England because it was a practical way for Christians to show their concern for education and for the poor. . . . Contributions to education by Raikes were: 1) Christian education as a tool for social reform; 2) Christian education as the basis for literacy training; and finally, and 3) children were taught proper behavior through positive and consistent reinforcement."[125]

This historical reflection would not be complete without reference to a noted opposition to Sunday school, as recorded by Ernest Hayes in the book *Raikes the Pioneer:* "The clergy and religious people of his day deliberately shunned the vulgar, as they called the masses and were cordially disliked and avoided by the people in

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[123] Ronnie Prevost and James E. Reed, *A History of Christian Education* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1993), 255.

[124] Reed and Prevost, 257.

[125] Ibid.

consequence. Therefore, Sunday for the masses was s day of rioting and drunkenness, or blood sports such as cock-fighting and bull-baiting. As Raikes began to bring ragged urchins (ragamuffins) to the church the respectable congregation gaped with astonishment and dismay. Raikes was regarded as 'mad.'"[126]

Despite the opposition, history reflects that the Sunday school movement continued, as noted by Prevost and Reed:

> Raikes found support for establishing Sunday school from John Wesley and William Fox. . . . They were very concerned, like Raikes, of the circumstances that affected the poor people especially the many who were incapable of reading the Bible. . . . . John Wesley helped to develop and establish schools and William Fox was instrumental with organizing schools into societies. In August of 1786 it was determined that the best approach to teaching the poor to read would be though Sunday schools. . , . On August 30, the first Sunday school society was established, the society for Promoting Sunday Schools throughout the British Dominions later known as the Sunday School Society. . . . The Sunday School Society was an important influence in the growth of the movement as it provided the financial support for hiring teachers; however, most of the teachers were volunteers.[127]

Overall, "Sunday school was based on the educational function of the church and the pedagogical laws of human kind."[128] And Carl Nelson writes, "From the earliest times in the Bible until 1780–when the first Sunday school was established-people who had faith in God also had ways to communicate that faith to each other, to non-believers, and to their children."[129] Then too, there were factors that made communication difficult. As noted by Prevost, "because of the industrial Revolution, differences within the levels

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[126] Ernest Hayes, *Raiked the Pioneer: Founder of Sunday Schools* (London: The National Sunday School Union, 1930), 46.

[127] Reed and Prevost, 259-260.

[128] Official Report of the Eleventh International Sunday School Convention, Toronto, Canada, 1905, *The Development of the Sunday School: 1780-1905* (The Executive Committee of the International Sunday School Association, Boston, 1905), 138.

[129] Nelson, accessed April 1, 2013.

of socioeconomic classes were developing. Even though there was wealth among some, the growing urban lower class numbers were increasing."[130] As Sunday schools emerged throughout England, this institution was catching hold in other parts of the world.

Sunday School in America

Anne M. Boylan, author of *Sunday School: the Formation of an American Institution* observes some differences: "In England, the nineteenth-century Sunday school was 'a relatively autonomous, working class institution,' drawing its students, teachers and financial support from local communities, while Sunday school in America was both a church and missionary institution that enrolled children from a variety of social class backgrounds. . . . With regards to literacy, British schools were much more important on spreading basic literacy than their American counterparts."[131]

Boylan continues stating "the American story was different. Whereas in the 1810's and 1820's American Sunday schools did indeed reach large numbers of children who had no other schooling opportunities, teaching them reading, writing and occasional arithmetic, the spread of weekday schools signaled an interest in free, tax-supported public school that was largely absent in England."[132] Boylan further says, "American Sunday schools rapidly shed any major responsibility for imparting basic literacy, leaving the bulk of that task to weekday schools. Sunday schools generally flourished wherever there were common schools; conversely the absence of daily schools usually signaled the

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[130] Reed and Prevost, 255-56.

[131] Boylan, 167.

[132] Ibid.

absence of Sunday school. In one area of the United States where Sunday schools might have supplied widespread literacy–the antebellum South–their potential was blocked by an official ideology committed to keeping the Black population illiterate."[133]

Sunday Schools and African Americans

The model for Sunday school traveled across the Atlantic from the English pioneers and established roots in America particularly after the American Revolution. Sunday schools within different denominations had their own identity based upon the characteristic needs of the people and the location of contexts. Early pioneers of educating African Americans in the church were Methodist worshippers who took on the leadership role to educate slaves. John Wesley played a key role in that educational effort. As summarized by Dr. L.D. Ervin in his book *The Faith Journey of Bishop E. Lynn Brown*, "the early church was not reluctant to appoint African American teachers and preachers."[134] Ervin further provides insights on the most renowned teacher/preacher, Richard Allen, "a member of St. George's Methodist Church in Philadelphia, who was allowed to purchase his freedom."[135]

Since the Bible was the initial literacy tool used by slaves in learning to read and write, the actions by Wesley and the Methodists were bold statements in their opposition against forced African American enslavement. C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya in the book *The Black Church in the African American Experience* state that "it was

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[133] Ibid.

[134] L. D. Ervin, *The Faith Journey of Bishop E. Lynn Brown: Images of God's Love, Grace, and Redemption* (Cincinnati, OH: L. D. Ervin, 2004), 22.

[135] Ibid.

unlawful to teach slaves to read and write. For slaves, freedom and empowerment meant becoming educated. First of all, literacy was the key to the scriptures, the Word of God, but education was also a rebuttal of the prevailing allegation that black people were a different order of human being and were incapable of learning and manipulating the master's language."[136]

Randolph Miller, in his article "Education in the Black Church" says that "Richard Allen, the founder of the denomination, reputedly organized the first Black Sunday School in America in 1795."[137] William DeVeauz observes that "what was unique for Allen and the early African Methodists was their understanding of the role of the church in relation to the society. These people, as a matter of course, were vitally involved in the social and political concerns that impacted them as Black people in America."[138]

As cited by Lincoln and Mamiya:

> Despite the fact that teaching a slave to read and write was illegal during slavery, one of the most persistent desires of the slaves was to be educated. . . . Sunday schools in the Black church were also instrumental for providing hope and inspiration by introducing literacy, competence in reading and writing, to a people who were once denied rights to learn and obtain some sort of structured education during the time of slavery. During the pre-civil war era, laws were established denying education to slaves. First of all, literacy was the key to the scriptures, the word of God, but education was also a rebuttal of the prevailing allegations that

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[136] C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African American Experience* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1990), 251.

[137] Randolph Crump Miller, "Education in the Black Church," *Religious Education* 69, no. 4 (July 1, 1974): 403-445. ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, accessed April 2, 2013, eBooks on EBSCOhost.

[138] William P. DeVeaux, "Christian faith and social policy in the thought of Richard Allen." *Journal of the Interdenominational Theological Center* 10, no. 1-2 (1983): 85-94, ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, accessed January 28, 2013, eBooks, EBSCOhost.

> Black people were a different order of human being, incapable of learning and manipulating the master's language.[139]

Richard Allen, the founder of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, and who stood firmly against slavery, stood up firmly in support of Sunday school education. As reported by Randolph Miller, "The African Methodist Episcopal church began its educational activities by establishing Sunday Schools."[140] Sunday schools were the beginning of active reading and studying God's word for life's application. Sunday schools provided the moral and ethical compass for children and adults. They did so by teaching biblical principles, especially the differences between right and wrong, and how to apply them to everyday living.

When using Sunday school as the foundation for education, "It is important to note that while many African Americans were slaves at this time, Allen was a freed slave. Allen wanted other Blacks to gain economic resources; to buy their freedom and to support themselves once they were free. He encouraged Blacks to educate themselves in academic areas and in trades, so that no one could say Blacks were innately inferior to whites."[141]

Thus, Sunday school was developed as a high priority with African Americans, especially their leaders. Perhaps the most distinguished advocate of religious education of a high quality by Blacks was Bishop Daniel Payne of the African Methodist Episcopal Church. Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya state:

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[139] Lincoln and Mamiya, 251.

[140] Miller.

[141] William P. DeVeaux, ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, accessed January 28, 2013, eBooks on EBSCOhost.

> As early as 1853 he criticized the leadership of schools with which he was familiar in Philadelphia. Many of the schools, he said, had unqualified teachers who were not genuinely concerned about the Sunday school. Furthermore, he felt that the teachers were not committed. Wherever he went his message was the same: 'Strive to secure qualified teachers for the Sunday Schools; to correct teaching deficiencies, he advised teachers to attend a weekly training class and build a good library. He suggested that it include a Bible, a Bible dictionary, Biblical geography, history, antiques, a book on self-culture for teachers, and psychology. Maps and charts were also considered essential.[142]

Lincoln and Mamiya state that "After Emancipation, newly freed slaves flocked to schools that were established by churches in the South, such as Savannah, Georgia in 1867. . . . The lack of employment caused by the civil war made the choice of attending school and obtaining an education more apparent for former slaves. Education was seen as a priority and Sunday schools were the first places of the educational process for many to begin."[143]

Sunday school and the Black Church have been the "light" to Africans on American soil. It symbolized hope and inspiration during a time of much despair and oppression. Sunday school and learning provided the moral and ethical structure of Christian principles and values. Learning and applying these values were contributing factors for survival within society. This was the empowerment and uplifting for those needing encouragement and support, especially during a time of systematic suppression and oppression.

Lincoln and Mamiya add,

> Christian principles were not only taught on Sundays by preaching sermons. The incorporation of a more structured form of education determined the need to further advance the literacy of the individual member and eventually the Black church as a congregation. Education was considered also a means to uplift a

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[142] Miller.

[143] Lincoln and Mamiya, 251.

> community. Sunday schools were established for black people, not only as a gathering place, but were considered to be the most effective strategy and main form of communicating with people. . . . Christian education within the church was considered to be priority because education was very important to African-Americans. Sunday schools were often the first places where black people made contact with the educational process: first hearing, then memorizing, and finally learning to read Bible stories.[144]

Sunday School in the Twentieth Century

Reed and Prevost, in *A History of Christian Education* wrote: "The twentieth century had witnessed a good swell in Christian education. Many persons are worthy of mention because of their contributions to this surge."[145] They make reference to George Albert Coe (1862-1951), whom they cite as "a driving force for the scientific study of religion and religious education in the early twentieth century; who wrote many books and articles and found time to write Christian education curriculum materials for use in many churches."[146] Reed and Prevost add that Coe was convinced that, since moral development was an important task of religion and that person were by nature religious, religious education should be made a part of general education; thus forming the Religious Education Association.[147]

Reed and Prevost note the contributions of William Clayton Bower, who helped shape religious education through teaching, writing, and organizational activities and were primarily in the fields of curriculum development, experiential education, sociology

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[144] Lincoln and Mamiya, 251.

[145] Reed and Prevost, 333.

[146] Ibid.

[147] Ibid., 334.

if education and moral and spiritual development.[148] They lifted up J. M. Price, who "serves as Sunday School evangelist in the Blood River Baptist Association in Kentucky." And finally, they paid tribute to Hugh Hartshorne, a student of George A. Coe, "Who was inspired by his mentor to further explore the issue of moral development and character education. [Writing in Childhood and Character: An Introduction to the Study of Religious Life of Children, Hartshorne defined religious education as: the process by which the individual, in response to a controlled environment, achieves a progressive, conscious, social adjustment, dominated by the spirit of brotherhood, and so directed as to promote the growth of a social order based on regard for the worth and destiny of every individual]"[149]

Summary

The institution of Sunday school has proven to be an educational structure that promotes literacy and empowerment that mainly targets the poor and oppressed. As stated earlier, the church, especially the Black church, was considered to be the point of contact that was consistent, relevant, and purposeful. It provided the moral and ethical structure of Christian principles and values. Learning and applying these values were contributing factors for survival within society. This was the empowerment and uplifting for those needing encouragement and support especially during a time of systematic suppression and oppression. Many of the early pioneers realized that a formal Christian education would provide an avenue to bring about more positive and productive changes

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[148] Ibid., 334-5.

[149] Hugh Hartshorne, *Childhood and Character: An Introduction to the Study of Religious Life of Children* (Boston, MA: Pilgrim Press, 1919), 6.

within a society. It was also hoped that the changes would improve societal woes through increasing literacy and educating for moral and ethical standards which were established by God. Christian education, through Sunday school, was the initial thought for consistent and relevant learning of Christian principles. It was this arena where values would develop and strengthen a society that needed help to overcome daily challenges in which many had little to no control over. Although we think of the Sunday school as an educational agency for children, it is actually the biggest adult educational program in our nation. Carl Nelson summarizes: Millions of adults gather in small groups Sunday after Sunday to read and discuss the many teachings of the Bible or topics of special interest to Christians. Such activity is a gentle but insistent reminder that we must be open to new truth and receptive to a fresh application of God's word to the problems which confront us.[150]

[150] Nelson, accessed April 1, 2013.

CHAPTER FOUR

METHODOLOGY

Hypothesis

The hypothesis of this ministry project proposes that the writer, working in a collaborative effort with members of First Baptist Church, can develop and implement effective strategies that will increase attendance and participation in Sunday school. This hypothesis is based on her personal experiences and information developed during her ten year membership and ministry duties at First Baptist Church. Her awareness of the needs of ministry, as well as her experiences as an educator, prepared her for this task, which will enhance not only Sunday school attendance, but will strengthen the overall ministry of the church.

The plan for the completion of the study would involve youth, Christian educators, and parents in a series of educational discussions with the goal of developing the necessary strategies to increase Sunday school attendance. The diverse group of participants would contribute to the success of the goal through a process of "learning by doing," which is a methodology tool known as action research. The implementation of action research "signals your intent to intervene in and improve your learning in order to improve practice, and accept responsibility for doing so."[1]

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[1] Jean McNiff and Jack Whitehead, *You and Your Action Research Project*, 3rd ed. (New York, NY: Routledge, 2010), 35.

Action research is just what the term implies. There must be action taken by the researcher and the participants in order to bring about change, a new perspective, personal growth, and allow contributions for improvements to enhance what is already established before the action research begins. Davydd J. Greenwood and Morten Levin, in their book, *Introduction to Action Research* discuss three elements that are required for this type of research:

> Action research refers to the conjunction of three elements: research, action, and participation. Unless all three elements are present, the research cannot be called Action Research. Put another way, action research is a form of research that generates knowledge claims for the express purpose of taking action to promote social change and social analysis. But the social change we refer to is not just any kind of change. Action research aims to increase the ability of the involved community or organization members to control their own destinies more effectively and to keep improving their capacity to do so.[2]

Intervention

As a member and ministry leader at First Baptist Church, the researcher, aware of the lack of participants in Sunday school, felt spiritually led to take steps to address the problem. As an educator in the public school system, she has spent over 20-years as a teacher. She has designed and implemented programs and strategies that promoted student growth and learning, which she felt could be replicated in the context. This study was completed in the context of First Baptist Church, North Indianapolis.

The purpose of the project was to explore possible strategies and predict future outcomes that will benefit the congregation and provide researched-based insight for the Christian Education leadership team by: 1) providing youth with a Sunday school that is

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[2] Davydd J. Greenwood and Morten Levin, *Introduction to Action Research* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc., 1998), 6.

relevant, consistent, purposeful, and engaging with hopes to increase attendance, involvement and retention; 2) empower and encourage parent participation and responsibility by offering support that may be needed to assist their youth; 3) and improve teacher morale through positive teaching experiences, and provide effective teacher training which includes a recognition/appreciation opportunity for their efforts.

Research Design

The design would include three groups: youth, educators, and parents, working separately and collectively in brainstorming, discussing, and through recommendations, presenting strategies that would meet the goal of the project. The responsive action research method, chosen by the researcher, would use qualitative analysis to evaluate the data. This type of analysis was chosen since it allows for variables within the research to be subjective rather than objective. The data would be triangulated by asking the parents, youth and Christian educators/leaders similar questions.

This method would allow the researcher to be critical, while making inferences of overlapping themes when finding similarities and differences of beliefs, attitudes, behaviors, and roles within the participating group. Additional data-gathering strategies would include personal informal discussions and interviews; pre and post-test surveys; observation; individual and collaborative group brainstorming and conversations; and recommendations by the participants of strategies that would achieve the goals of the project. Careful examination and analysis of any additional background information was pertinent as it provided insight in identifying the concerns of the Sunday school program, and how to address these concerns strategically.

The specific design of the project would include the following steps by the researcher: 1) after some brainstorming, prepare a written plan explaining the project and/or training; participant demographics (age, gender, how many, etc); how to obtain the necessary volunteers for the project; the place of the project, and duration; materials needed; the facilitator, and the support needed; pre-test plans (contact with possible volunteers, surveys, etc); topics and methods of discussions; post-test process; and the collection, documentation, and presentation of data.

The final plans for the project would include: focusing on youth, educators and parents to make up a focus group of twenty-eight participants; once identified, they would be provided with a pre-test, open-ended survey based on their group criteria.

The first week session would include an orientation, return of the pre-test surveys, and discussions of the comments from the surveys. On the second week, the researcher would meet with the youth only, which would involve a deeper discussion and dialog concerning their survey questions, their personal observations, comments, and recommendations. During the third week, the researcher would meet with the educators only, discuss their survey questions, and give them the opportunity to discuss their own views on the issues of Sunday school, and offer suggestions/recommendations.

During the fourth week, the researcher would meet with the parents, discuss their survey questions, and give them opportunity to share their thoughts/concerns relative to Sunday school, and attendance. On the fifth week, all groups will meet with the researcher for a collaborative workshop. This would involve the use of charts to share their thoughts, and develop strategies that would gain greater attendance and participation in Sunday school.

As the researcher proceeds to launch the project, she would gain prior permission to address the youth members during Bible study to discuss the study and what it entailed. She would discuss with the lead teacher of Sunday school the purpose of the study, and request permission to meet with the Sunday school teachers regarding the project and completion of the questionnaires. The questionnaires would be administered by a color coding system without any names for privacy and un-unbiased purposes.

Measurement/Instruments

Measurement of the project would be completed through the use of pre and post-test, open-ended survey questions. The researcher will the tool of data triangulation as the method to discover overlapping themes, beliefs, attitudes, values, behavioral patterns that could emerge from the data collected.

First, the youth survey would be as made on blue paper, with a "kid friendly" font so it would not look too official, and to allow honest and open responses. The parent/significant adult survey, given that title based on the current family dynamics, would be printed on a pink copy paper for easy identification, with questions that speak to the needs and concerns of the parents. Some children are raised by grandparents and other family members outside of their biological parents, so this was an effort to make everyone feel inclusive. Lastly, the educator's survey would be printed on a different color, which would allow easy identification by the researcher.

Summary

The researcher is an educator in an urban setting in Indianapolis, Indiana. Educators are always looking for innovative, strategic and researched based strategies to motivate students, increase comprehension and retain information that is applicable. It is also the belief that through these interventions, students usually begin to have a better sense of self-worth and value, therefore raising their self-esteem.

CHAPTER FIVE

FIELD EXPERIENCE

Implementing the Research Project

In this chapter, the writer presents the results of the research that was implemented in completing the project. Specifically, the project was authorized through consultation, advice and support of the Senior Pastor, Dr. Ivan D. Hicks. Under his direction, the project was completed in collaboration between the writer, and various entities of First Baptist Church North, Indianapolis, Indiana. Those entities included the Educational Superintendent, the teachers, and other members of the Christian education department; as well as parents and youth.

Surveys

The project included first, a distribution of surveys and questionnaires to youth, parents, and teachers to gather data relevant to their views on Sunday school, what could be done to improve attendance and participation. That data was collected by the writer analyzed by the writer what she used to help determine the concerns of the participants and possible design to use in presenting the results to a specific group of members. The purpose of that group was to serve as a focus group to review, discuss, and analyze the survey data. The three groups would then reconvene, all participants would discuss the

survey results and provide feedback and/or possible recommendations as to what should be done with the survey comments. The pre-surveys are as follows:

Youth Survey

Please take a few moments to complete this survey/questionnaire. Do not include your name. Your responses will be discussed collectively and will provide valuable input on how we can improve our service to Sunday school and youth involvement. Thank you.

Age:_____ Male:_____ Female:_____

1. How often do you attend Sunday school?

   ___Every Sunday ____Twice a month _____Once/month ____Never

2. What do you feel are the reasons why you attend or not? (I attend because: I like it, my parents make me, I want to be with friends ; I don't attend because of: time, no transportation, other activities I'm involved in, etc.)

3. In what ways do you feel that Sunday school can help you learn about who Christ is in your life as a youth person? (talking with peers, sharing experiences, other, etc)

4. If you attend, or were to attend Sunday school, do you feel that the lessons taught could help you in your daily life as a teen? Explain how?

5. In what ways do you think Sunday school can have more meaning in the lives of other youth experiencing some of the same things you may be?

6. What do you like about Sunday school?

7. What do you dislike about Sunday school?

8. How do you build your relationship with Christ? (Pray, read Bible, study, talk to friends, adults/ family members, my Pastor etc.)

9. What would make "your" Christian experience more powerful at First Baptist Church North?

10. What other suggestions do you have that would possibly increase youth participation in Sunday school?

11. What can we do to invite guests and make them feel welcomed here at First Baptist for Sunday school or any other youth activity?

Sunday School Christian Educators

Please take a few moments to complete this survey/questionnaire. Do Not include your name. Your responses will be discussed collectively and will provide valuable input on how we can improve our service to Sunday school and youth involvement. Thank you.

Your Age: ___ 21-30 yrs ___ 31-40yrs ___ 41-50yrs ___ 51-60yrs ___ 60 + yrs

Gender: ____ Male ____ Female

1. What do you feel, as a Sunday school teacher or youth leader, are the reasons for poor attendance/involvement among youth?

2. Do you believe that the lessons are engaging and relevant for today's youth population? If so, how? If not, what would you recommend?

3. What steps do you take to prepare your lessons? (Bible study, prayer time, read about current trends, etc?)

4. What information do you use to determine the needs of your class when providing Christian education?

5. What impact do you believe your teaching has on your students?

6. What resources do you currently use in your classroom to execute/teach lessons? (i.e. Sunday school curriculum, workbooks, videos, games, crafts, props, etc.?)

7. What other resources do you need that may help make your Sunday school lessons even more engaging and relevant?

8. Tell what, if anything, would you like to see implemented in the Sunday school/youth program that is currently not in place?

Parent/Significant Adult Survey

Please take a few moments to complete this survey/questionnaire. Do not include your name. Your responses will be discussed collectively and will provide valuable input on how we can improve our service to Sunday school and youth involvement. Thank you.

Your Age: ___ 28-35 Yrs. ___ 36-45 Yrs. ___ 46-54 Yrs. ___ 55 + Yrs.

Gender : ___ Male ___ Female

1. Age of child/children? _____
2. How often does your child attend Sunday School?
   ___ Every Sunday ___ Twice a month ___ Once/month ___ Never
3. If not, what factor(s) do you believe hinder your family's Sunday school attendance/ participation?
4. What would influence your participation? (Flex Schedule, Different Day, Different Time, More Activities, Teachers, etc.?)
5. In what ways do you feel that Sunday school is beneficial for a child's upbringing?
6. List ways that you are satisfied with the knowledge your child is learning from Sunday school at First Baptist Church North.
7. List ways you feel that Sunday school can be more effective.
8. What role would "you" play in your child's/children's Christian education experience?
9. What supports do you think "you" need to help your child become the best "well rounded" Christian person?
10. List any ideas you have that would encourage youth attendance or re-involvement at First Baptist Church North-Indianapolis.
11. What activities are "you" interested in participating and willing to assist in the advancement of Sunday school at First Baptist?
12. Any other information that you may want to share?

As indicated, three different surveys were provided; the youth survey was provided to the youth, the teacher survey was provided to the teachers, and the parent

survey was provided to the parents. The three groups served as the focus group which participated in a series of workshops.

Focus Group

The research project began in February 2012 and continued thru June 2012. The focus group sessions began on Tuesday, April 24, 2012 at 6:30 pm to 7:30 pm; with the next three sessions on the succeeding Tuesday nights. Since the focus group was comprised of three distinct groups, only one group met during the three subsequent sessions. This gave them the opportunity to discuss and develop their own plans in support of increasing Sunday school attendance. The fifth and final session was held on Saturday, June 23, 2012, at which time all groups attended, discussed their workshops, and working collaboratively presented a unified plan for achieving the goal. Each session was preceded by refreshments, and a time of fellowship as the participants listened to Christian themed music playing in the background.

All workshops were facilitated by the researcher at the context site, First Baptist Church, North Indianapolis, 880 West 28th Street, Indianapolis, Indiana. The data collected is a direct result of the focus group, which included members of the congregation, and contextual associates totaling 28 participants. A demographic chart of the participants is below:

Focus Group Participants					
10-14	15-18	19-30	31-40	41-59	60 +
7 Male 4 Female 3	5 Male 2 Female 3	2 Male 0 Female 2	4 Male 0 Female 4	8 Male 1 Female 7	2 Male 1 Female 1

Session 1–Youth/Educators/Parents

After the group had gathered, the writer commended them for their participation, support, and the importance of their involvement in the overall objective of the project. She reviewed with them prior discussions about the surveys and provided them with more specific details concerning the project. The writer reported that thirty surveys were collected. The researched made a random selection of questions and answers from the surveys of each group, which were discussed with the group. The discussion included recommendations from the participants as to what steps should be taken based on the comments. A more complete summary of comments recorded on the surveys are provided in the data collection section of this chapter.

Next, since surveys and data pertained to three separate groups; the youth, teachers and parents, it was decided that each group would discuss the survey responses relevant to their group. After the individual groups met and completed their discussions, the three groups reconvened, discussed their sessions, and presented recommendations that would be helpful in developing effective strategies for more active participation of youth in Sunday school. Based on their recommendations and the results of the session the writer decided the next meeting would only include the youth. Then the following week, she would meet with the parents, and the next week, the teachers. The participants agreed, and the writer concluded the session by thanking them for their participation followed by a closing prayer.

Sample of Pre-Test Survey Questions/Responses

The following questions/answers, discussed during the first session, are samples of the responses recorded on the returned pre-test surveys completed by the youth, educators and parents.

Youth Survey

Q. In what ways do you feel that Sunday school can help you learn about who Christ is in your life as a youth person?
   a. I feel that I could learn about the Bible.
   b. I could learn how Jesus helps us in every way.
   c. I could learn to be like Jesus by following his teachings.

Q. If you attend, or were to attend Sunday school, explain how you feel that the lessons taught could help you in your daily life as a teen?
   a. I could learn how to use the Bible when I need assistance.
   b. The lessons are taught for life application, if the right teacher would "make it plain" for us.
   c. The lessons help me to understand the Bible.

Christian Educator Survey

Q. What steps do you take to prepare your lessons?
   a. Attend teacher's meetings on Wednesdays
   b. Have prayer time on a daily basis.
   c. Follow the Sunday school curriculum.

Q. What impact do you believe your teaching has on your students?
   a. By providing a Biblical foundation.
   b. Lessons help students to experience life as a Christian.
   c. Just the fact that they are listening and asking engaging questions is a plus.

Parent/Significant Adult Survey

Q. In what ways do you feel that Sunday school is beneficial for a child's upbringing?
   a. Students learn about Jesus and what He sacrificed for everyone.
   b. Students are able to have more in-depth knowledge of the Bible.
   c. Students establishing a foundation in Jesus as personal savior.

Q. What role would YOU have in your child's/children's Christian Education experience?
   a. Making sure they are at church more often.
   b. Assist with Sunday school and participate also.
   c. Read and discuss Bible and/or lesson taught with them.

Session 2–Youth Only

This session, held for the youth members, began with refreshments as music played in the background; followed by the official opening with prayer. The seating area was arranged in a circle in order to foster face to face communication. The participants were given a writing assignment which was used for discussion. They completed a personal inventory document, with information on their strengths; personal areas needing improvement; hobbies; and concerns they felt other youth may have. The purpose of the inventory was to give them a blue print on what their thoughts, and to keep the conversation focused. This discussion allowed the youth to talk about their own personal concerns, and issues with others who may be experiencing similar situations.

Next, the group discussed the survey questionnaires administered and discussed during session one. The researcher used a flipchart so that responses dictated could be written for the entire group to read afterwards. The participants were divided into two groups of six with mixed ages. Each group was given a set of surveys to review and discuss, along with a large sheet of chart paper and markers to write down similar themes from the survey responses.

The assignment was to think of ways that would help youth discover how Sunday school is a great help in moral and character development. They were also encouraged to include some of their own personal concerns from the inventory. After the discussion, both groups reconvened to discuss their responses. Each group selected a representative to summarize their responses. While Group A was presenting their responses, Group B was instructed to review their own written chart and place a checkmark on their charts showing similar concerns.

Group B was also given the opportunity to have their representative stand and present the group's responses. Group A also place a checkmark on their charts that indicated similar concerns they noted from the surveys. This exercise was purposeful for breaking a larger task into smaller tasks, discovering similarities and differences between both groups, and prioritizing the concerns and issues that were reviewed. The researcher compiled the responses from both groups onto one large chart page, and discussed the points of view of each group. She shared with the entire group the value of their input, and commended their collaborative efforts for that part of the session.

The final activity was to have the group collectively brainstorm ideas that would encourage youth to attend Sunday school based upon the collaborative responses of both groups. As they brainstormed ideas, responses were recorded on large chart paper. The session concluded with words of encouragement, thankfulness, and announcing the next session for youth on Saturday, June 2, 2012 at 10:00 am, which will include all three groups. A participant offered the closing prayer, with the serving of parting snacks.

Session 3–Parents Only

This session was held for the parents only. As the group entered, they were served with light refreshments; entertained by background gospel music; and a power point presentation, which included various ethnic group families, Christians and symbols, and other images. The power point presentation and socializing continued as the participants took seats around a round table, which fostered conferencing and collaboration.

The session officially began with a greeting and prayer. As the researcher reviewed the goals, the session included an "ice breaker;" providing each participant with

a fun-size bag of Skittles, which had different colors representing different topics. They were instructed to open the bag and choose one color, and to save the rest to eat later. After the color was selected by each member, the color representations were shown on the LCD projector screen. The chart consisted of the following:

Skittles Candy Colors	
Color	Meaning
Red	Tell what you love most about your child/children
Yellow	What is your greatest fear for your child/children
Green	Describe the goals or aspirations you have for your child/children
Orange	Tell of a time you were most proud of your child/children
Purple	Describe your favorite Bible story as a child

The participants had lively discussion about their children. The researcher noted the joy expressed as they shared their stories with one another. This portion of the session lasted about 20 minutes. The format of this session followed the format of session two. Next, the participants reviewed the survey questionnaires that were administered and discussed during session one. The facilitator again used a flipchart so that responses dictated could be recorded for the entire group to read afterwards. Parents were encouraged to pair up during this portion of the session. Similar to the youth session, each pair of parents were given a set of surveys to review and discuss. They also used a large sheet of chart paper and markers to write down similar themes from the survey responses.

After reviewing the survey responses, the participants were asked to look at similar themes of the written responses. After discussion, they determined the re-

occurring issues and concerns from the surveys, and wrote them on the chart paper. They were also encouraged to include some of their own personal concerns if they felt comfortable in doing so. The group was allowed fifteen to twenty minutes for discussion and completing the charts. After the discussion, all participants reconvened to discuss their written responses. The facilitator encouraged open discussion of the group reports. As they responded, researcher recorded them on chart paper, which was viewed by the group.

This exercise was effective for breaking a larger task into smaller tasks, while discovering similarities and differences between both groups, and prioritizing the concerns and issues that were reviewed. The facilitator compiled the responses onto one large chart page and discussed the various points of view. She also shared with the entire group the value of their input, and commended their collaborative efforts for that part of the session.

During the final part of the session, they brainstormed ideas that could show parents how to become more involved in the Christian education of their child. The group was also encouraged to include any parental support needed by the parents, as may have been indicated on the survey. Their responses were recorded on another large sheet of chart paper.

After presenting some ten ideas, the session was concluded with instructions that the next session of the parents will be held on Saturday, June 2, 2012 at 10:00 am. This would be the final session, which will include all focus group members. The facilitator thanked the group for their participation, and asked for a volunteer to say the closing

prayer. As they departed, each participant was given a small appreciation gift, and a note pad or booklet.

Session 4–Christian Educators Only

This session was held only for the teachers and youth leaders members who served as part of the focus group. This session was also facilitated by the researcher. This group of participants gathered in the Fellowship Hall of First Baptist Church. Upon entering, the facilitator displayed a revised power point presentation showing families of various ethnic backgrounds, Christian themes and symbols. However, this presentation included images of teaching and students. The facilitator welcomed the participants and offered the refreshments of cinnamon rolls and coffee. Also, there was also contemporary and gospel music playing in the background. The participants were invited to take an apple from a bowl sitting in the center of the table.

The group continued to socialize and eat while viewing the power point presentation. In order to foster group discussion and collaboration, the seating was arranged around a large table, similar to session three. After about ten minutes, the session began with a greeting and followed with an opening prayer. The facilitator explained to goals of the session, which began with an ice breaker activity. Each participant was given a paper with the pattern of two large apples. One apple was labeled "The Good Apple" and the other was labeled "The Bad Apple." Inside each apple, they were encouraged to write their thoughts on characteristics or traits of a "good" teacher and a "challenged" teacher. They were allowed about six to seven minutes for this

activity. After time had elapsed, each person shared their apple charts with the group. The charts were posted on the wall to be used during the session.

Following the same agenda format of the previous sessions, the next item on the agenda was to review the survey questionnaires that contained the written responses from the teachers. The facilitator used her flipchart so that responses dictated could be recorded for the entire group to read afterwards. Teachers and youth leaders were encouraged to divide into two groups of four for this portion of the session. Similar to the youth session, each group of teachers were given a set of surveys to review and discuss. They too used a large sheet of chart paper and markers to write down similar themes from the survey responses.

After reviewing the survey responses, they were given the assignment to look at similar themes of the written responses from the surveys. After discussion, they were to determine the re-occurring issues and concerns from the surveys and write them on the chart paper. They were also encouraged to include some of their own personal concerns as teachers, if they would like to share. The group was allowed fifteen to twenty minutes for discussion and completing the charts.

After the discussion, all participants reconvened to discuss their written responses. The facilitator encouraged open discussion of the group reports. The group was allowed about twenty minutes for discussion. After the discussion, both groups reconvened to discuss their responses. Each group had a representative to share the responses of the group. While Group A was presenting their responses, Group B was instructed to review their own written chart and place a mark on their charts showing similar concerns. Group B was also given the opportunity to have their representative stand and present the

responses of the group. Group A was to also place a checkmark on their charts that indicated similar concerns they noted from the surveys. As the responses were being presented, the facilitator recorded them on chart paper for viewing by the group.

This exercise was also effective for breaking a larger task into smaller tasks while discovering similarities and differences between both groups, and prioritizing the concerns and issues that were reviewed. The facilitator compiled the responses onto one large chart page and discussed the various points of view. The charts were placed on the wall. She also shared with the entire group the value of their input, and commended their collaborative efforts.

The final part of this session was to brainstorm ideas that teachers could use to increase youth enrollment and participation in Sunday school. The group was also encouraged to include any teaching supports or needs if indicated on the survey. As they brainstormed ideas, the facilitator recorded these responses on another large sheet of chart paper. The session concluded with words of encouragement, thankfulness, explaining that the next session for teachers would be held on Saturday, June 2, 2012 at 10:00 am, which will include all three groups. A participant offered the closing prayer; and each teacher was presented with a coffee mug and a "Teacher Appreciation" card.

Session 5–Youth/Christian Educators/Parents

This fifth and final session, conducted on Saturday, June 2, 2012, was attended by the entire focus group. As the participants entered, they were greeted by another revised power point presentation displaying images of youth, families of various ethnic backgrounds, teachers, and students, along with Christian themes and symbols. There

was also contemporary and gospel music playing in the background. A continental breakfast was served for the participants. During this session, each group summarized their individual sessions, which was displayed by the researcher on a large chart.

Data Analysis

As previously stated, the focus group identified three groups of participants: youth, teacher/youth teachers, and parents. Based on this outcome, the researcher decided that the focus group would be completed by allowing the three groups to complete their study in individual meetings. That is, all three groups met during the first meeting. This was followed by the researcher meeting with each of the groups separately. During the fifth and final meeting, all three groups convened, summarized their meetings, and through a collaborative effort, provided suggestions and recommendations to achieve the goals of increasing Sunday school participation.

As previously shown, participants from each group were provided with a survey relative to their group. The following are summaries of surveys completed by group members, including an overview of the age group; gender; and responses from various participants relating to that specific question.

Youth Survey

The following data relates to information compiled from all youth.

Ages: 10-17 Males: 8 Females: 8

How often do you attend Sunday school?

3 Every Sunday 5 Twice a month 5 Once/month 3 Rare

1. What do you feel are the reasons why you attend or not? (I attend because: I like it, my parents make me, I want to be with friends; I don't attend because of: time, no transportation, other activities I'm involved in, etc.)

    a. I want to be with my friends that I don't get to see at school.
    b. I like to learn the lessons and play the Biblical games.
    c. I do not like it because it is boring and too long.
    d. I do not like to read all the time and the teacher just talks to us.

2. In what ways do you feel that Sunday school can help you learn about who Christ is in your life as a youth person (talking with peers, sharing experiences, other, etc)?

    a. I can talk about my experiences and find that others have the same issues.
    b. I like learning from the elders in the church and listen to what it was like for them as a teen.

3. If you attend, or were to attend Sunday school, do you feel that the lessons taught could help you in your daily life as a teen? Explain how?

    a. Yes, because the lessons would show how to behave in certain situations.
    b. Yes, because it would teach hoe to make positive choices and think of the consequences.

4. In what ways do you think Sunday school can have more meaning in the lives of other youth experiencing some of the same things you may be?

    a. Sunday school helps to spread the Word to others.
    b. Youth would less likely "be in trouble".
    c. It would teach who we are in Christ, even though we are a young generation.

5. What do you like about Sunday school?

    a. I like being with friends.
    b. I like having my own class and peers.
    c. I like my teacher.

6. What do you dislike about Sunday school?

    a. Too early in the morning.
    b. Going to Sunday school and church makes for a long, boring day.

7. How do you build your relationship with Christ? (Pray, read Bible, study, talk to friends, adults/ family members, my Pastor etc.)

    a. I pray.
    b. Talk with my mom about things in the Bible.
    c. I go to Bible study on Tuesdays.

8. What would make "your" Christian experience more powerful at First Baptist Church North?

    a. There needs to be more youth events
    b. There should be more kids to come
    c. Have more active teachers who want to stay.
    d. Choose more youth engaging topics.
    e. Use technology in the classrooms for Sunday school.

9. What other suggestions do you have that would possibly increase youth participation in Sunday school?

    a. Create more outreach projects.
    b. Have more Christian field trips and excursions for everyone.
    c. Associate with youth groups from other churches and make friends with them.
    d. Stop having adults dictate what we can and cannot do without listening to us first.

10. What can we do to invite guests and make them feel welcomed here at First Baptist for Sunday school or any other youth activity?

    a. Seeking friendships with other church youth groups
    b. Ask our peers to come

There were many positive comments given to the researcher from the youth about their views on church and Sunday school. It was very encouraging to hear the awesome comments the youth shared with the group. Those who usually attend felt good about church because of their involvement, and that they are allowed to make some decisions on a leadership level. One youth conveyed that he likes church because he loves God and would not be here without Him. Another youth made the statement that she loves church because she would not be able to understand life. The group discussed that the whole

church needs to be involved in activities together to provide a more family-like atmosphere. They mentioned that church brings them closer to God through the teachings of the Bible, and from the Pastor's sermons. They further commented on the Pastor's knowledge and impartation of words they did not know before.

The youth were very forthcoming with their opinions and offered several suggestions that would help in the re-engagement of Sunday school. They felt there should be more youth involved in the youth ministry. They would like to have a church reunion of the members who used to attend First Baptist Church, North Indianapolis. They would like more clubs and activities offered. One person expressed the concern for the Pastor to preach to them, and not the adults all the time; and that songs or music in church should include the sounds youth could enjoy. Many kids would like to use their electronics with the belief that they would help facilitate their learning. They also expressed having the freedom to pick and choose the activities they would like, opposed to doing what adults dictate. Finally, there were discussions of more community involvement.

Parent/Significant Adult Survey

The following data relates to information compiled from all parents.

Age: __1__ 28-35 Yrs. __2__ 36-45 Yrs. __1__ 46-54 Yrs. __4__ 55 + Yrs.

Gender : __2__ Males __6__ Females

_____ Age of child/children?

How often does your child attend Sunday School?

__0__ Every Sunday __4__ Twice a month __2__ Once/month __2__ Rare

1. If not, what factor(s) do you believe hinder your family's Sunday school attendance/ participation?

    a. Heavy work schedule
    b. Tired from the week
    c. Running late all the time

2. What would influence your participation? (Flex Schedule, Different Day, Different Time, More Activities, Teachers, etc.?)

    a. Offering a different time
    b. Refreshing the teachers
    c. Make Sunday school more interactive for kids so they want to come.

3. In what ways do you feel that Sunday school is beneficial for a child's upbringing?

    a. It helps to teach them how to get along with others
    b. It allows opportunities to ask questions in a non-threatening way.
    c. It adds to the Christian foundation at home.
    d. Students can learn about the Bible, increase their faith and learn of the establishment of the church.
    e. Sunday school provides the Biblical and Christian foundation needed for life as adults.
    f. Not sure.

4. List ways that you are satisfied with the knowledge your child is learning from Sunday school at First Baptist Church North.

    a. Just the fact that learning is taking place
    b. The students seem to have a basic knowledge of who God is.
    c. They are learning about Jesus and what He sacrificed for them.
    d. Happiness in knowing that students are learning to be nice and kind to one another by showing love just as God loves us.
    e. They are able to get and in-depth knowledge of the Bible
    f. They come together as youth to learn about Christ.

5. List ways you feel that Sunday school can be more effective.

    a. Provide more interaction such as games role playing and plays for the congregation to see what they are learning;
    b. Show more displays within the youth center so kids could see their works and share them with others to have a sense of pride in what they are doing;
    c. Classes need to have teachers that can relate to youth on their level, possibly younger teachers or youth leaders;
    d. Provide Christian movies to dialogue about and maybe puppet plays;

e. Teach more about the Books of the Bible and explain their importance: 6) Find ways to attract more youth to attend;
f. Sunday school is already effective the way it is.

6. What role would "you" play in your child's/children's Christian education experience?

a. Support
b. Getting their child there and reinforcing that at home;
c. Assist with Sunday school and participate themselves;
d. Provide encouragement to come and learn more;
e. Discuss and read the Bible with them, make sure they attend on a regular basis, including Vacation Bible School and any other youth-oriented events;
f. Reading the Bible more as the parent to be able to answer any questions their child may have;
g. Teach a class, volunteer.

7. What supports do you think "you" need to help your child become the best "well rounded" Christian person?

a. Having the support from family and the church family.
b. Showing them by example, "I have to practice what I preach." This also goes for other adults and teachers in Sunday school.
c. Making sure everyone is up and dressed on time.

8. List any ideas you have that would encourage youth attendance or re-involvement at First Baptist Church North-Indianapolis.

a. Getting parents more involved so they will bring their children.
b. Talking with them about everyday life.
c. Having one on one discussion.
d. Trying more youthful activities with them.
e. Getting and keeping the parents involved by doing adult activities.
f. Offering more activities outside of church so that children can interact with other Christians and see what they were doing.
g. Providing more mentor opportunities.
h. Providing childcare during church and making sure parents are informed.
i. Reinforcing that youth involvement starts with the parents and the concept of unity must be understood.
j. Some respondents were "not sure."

9. What activities are "you" interested in participating and willing to assist in the advancement of Sunday school at First Baptist?

a. Helping with preschoolers and teens;

b. Assist with planning events and other activities;
c. Help with crafts, displays and bulletin boards; and
d. Teach a class in Sunday school.

10. Any other information that you may want to share?

a. Encourage listening to the youth by asking what they would like more of and what is important to them
b. Encourage more ownership and involvement
c. Plan a Sunday where the youth are not only involved with the service, but to also invite a youth speaker to deliver the message that addresses the specific needs.

Additional suggestions shared by the parents included listening to the youth by asking them what they would like more of. This would encourage them to have more valid input in what goes on with them so they could take more ownership and involvement. Another suggestion was to plan one Sunday where not only the youth dictates most of the service, but to have a young speaker deliver the message that addresses the specific issues as well.

Sunday School Christian Educators

The following data relates to information compiled from all Christina Educators.

Your Age: __2__ 21-30 yrs __1__ 31-40 yrs __2__ 41-59 yrs __3__ 60+ yrs

Gender: __2__ Male __6__ Female

1. What do you feel, as a Sunday school teacher or youth leader, are the reasons for poor attendance/involvement among youth?

a. Lack of parental support was the main cause. They expressed that children do not attend Sunday school on their own.
b. There seems to be a lack of parent interest and parental requirement that youth should attend Sunday school or any other activities in church.
c. Unsteady planning and inconsistencies in programming.

2. Do you believe that the lessons are engaging and relevant for today's youth population? If so, how? If not, what would you recommend?

    a. Some had mixed feelings about the lessons, but needed the knowledge to be able to adapt the lessons according to the needs of the students and their issues.
    b. Some also stated that many of the pre-written Bible stories are too difficult for the youth to apply to what goes on in their lives.

3. What steps do you take to prepare your lessons? (Bible study, prayer time, read about current trends, etc?)

    a. They attend teacher's meetings on Wednesdays,
    b. They read the Bible,
    c. Have prayer time, and use the Bible along with the Sunday school curriculum to find complimentary scriptures.
    d. Some teachers concluded that they listen to the music kids listen to, and try to find ways to have discussions based upon the songs. Then they relate the messages according to Biblical principles.
    e. Others just merely "follow the curriculum".

4. What information do you use to determine the needs of your class when providing Christian education?

    a. Group discussions
    b. Feedback from the adults and other Christian educators.
    c. The literature provided by Sunday school (curriculum).
    d. Feedback from Sunday school lead-educator.
    e. Brainstorming that allows hearing beyond meaning for their needs.

5. What impact do you believe your teaching has on your students?

    a. They helped with establishing a Biblical foundation for the students.
    b. The information they have is being used to help students navigate their day as Christians and not like everyone else.
    c. Youth listened for the most part, but only to what was interesting to them.
    d. The subject matter of the curriculum is interesting to many of the youth.
    e. However, one participant explained that the "real issue" was finding the appropriate instructor to deliver the lessons effectively.

6. What resources do you currently use in your classroom to execute/teach lessons? (i.e. Sunday school curriculum, workbooks, videos, games, crafts, props, etc).

    a. The curriculum designed for each particular age group,
    b. Coloring pages and art/crafts supplies,

c. The Scriptures,
d. Outside the curriculum journals,
e. Interactive games,
f. Group discussions,
g. Videos and compact discs.
h. One teacher included that she even includes using YouTube from time to time.

7. What other resources do you need that may help make your Sunday school lessons even more engaging and relevant?

   a. The engagement of other youth groups
   b. Provide field experiences that make the lessons more applicable.

8. Tell what, if anything, would you like to see implemented in the Sunday school/youth program that is currently not in place?

   a. Not having traditional lessons but have tailored towards today's issues,
   b. Providing the older youth with younger, more engaging teachers,
   c. Offering or establishing a parental and adult advisory committee.
   d. Lastly, they would like to have a schedule provided for the adults and kids. This may encourage involvement because people are informed on what is going on. And also, they feel that this would facilitate youth and adults planning together for more cohesiveness.

The following additional items were also requested: not having traditional lessons but have tailored towards today's issues, providing the older youth with younger, more engaging teachers, offering or establishing a parental and adult advisory committee. Lastly, they would like to have a schedule provided for the adults and kids. This may encourage involvement because people are informed on what is going on. And also, they (youth and adults) can plan better.

Focus Group Results

The focus group, consisting of twenty eight participants, was homogeneous within the ethnographic culture, but allowed for diversity in age, gender, and role responsibilities. The researcher noted that the group was astounded by the discussions

and conversations of the church members; and the adults were extremely impressed with the youth responses. Many in the group were encouraged that First Baptist was indeed making an impact on the youth within the congregation; which led some to say that we were not that "far off the mark" in responding to the needs of the youth and ministry.

Other observations included:

a. The conversations were very engaging.

b. Group collaboration and brainstorming ideas were amazing. It was best decided that in order to re-activate Sunday school attendance was to have a "Back to Sunday School Kick Off" as the initial start. This is along the similar premises of a Back to School program in secular schools.

c. The group decided to have bright and colorful table displayed in the vestibule are of the church to promote Sunday school. The will provide information about Sunday school and will allow everyone to re-enroll or enroll in classes.

d. There was a request to mount a large bulletin board near the entrance of the entrance of the youth center located in the fellowship hall. This display will be visible and eye-catching for passersby who could obtain information about the Christian Education programs and youth agenda.

These and other ideas were in support of the primary objection of increasing the attendance and participation of Sunday school attendance for youth, ages 10-17. During the weeks that followed, measurement of the project was completed through the use of a post-test survey. This involved the collection of Sunday school attendance data, which was compared with the pre-test data. A pre and post-test chart is below:

Pre and Post-Test Chart

Sunday School Participation						
Pre-Test						Totals
10-14	15-18	19-30	31-40	41-59	60 +	
7	5	2	4	8	2	28
Post-test						
8	8	3	4	9	3	35

As reflected by the chart, there has been an increase of four youth attending Sunday school since the project, and an overall increase of seven attending Sunday school. Hence, the data reflects the project was successful.

CHAPTER SIX

SUMMARY, REFLECTIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS

Summary

This project was undertaken to address the lack of youth, ages 10-17, attending and participating in Sunday school at First Baptist Church North Indianapolis. In response to this concern, the researcher devised an educational workshop that involved collaboration between the researcher, the youth, educators and parents in response to this concern. The researcher believed it was imperative to include all three entities because each one has a significant role as they are interdependent of each other.

It was the belief of the researcher that Sunday school provides the moral and ethical compass for youth. It also establishes the Christian foundation that is invaluable for youth as they develop into young adults and later adulthood. Students will become equipped and empowered in knowing there are other alternatives when faced with the many challenges in life. They will need guidance and biblical principles. The goal of the project was to provide youth and others involved in Sunday school with these principles. In the view of the writer, it was imperative to being youth into Sunday school, get them involved, which would result in their regular attendance and biblical learning.

This was accomplish through the collaboration of the three entities who participated in the workshop; pre and post-tests, five educational sessions, consisting of extensive dialog and discussions relating to the questions and answers on the pretest

surveys. The participants understood that their primary goal, based on the questions and answers, was to consider the concern of the lack of Sunday school attendance and devise possible strategies that would result in an increase in Sunday school attendance and participation.

Reflections

The project began through the evaluation of the Sunday school program, specifically the attendance of youth, which through the information and documentation clearly showed the lack of youth attendance and participation. As she considered how to present this finding to the church leaders and congregation, the researcher developed three different surveys for the youth, parents, and Christian educators. The surveys contained over lapping themes which were later analyzed and consolidated.

The researcher, after gaining the approval and support from the pastor, was able to confirm the collaboration with the youth, Christian educators and parents. This was a major step in finalizing the plan for the educational study through the focus group. The group willingly participated in the planned five sessions, which were held at First Baptist Church North Indianapolis.

The results were that each group had an opportunity to convene in order to evaluate and discuss the issues and concerns from the data collected regarding Sunday school attendance. Possible strategies were brainstormed, with decisions as to which of the top five would be implemented to start with the process. It was also decided that a re-evaluative strategy would have to take place in order to gauge the program's successes and weaknesses. A timeline was established should the strategy or strategies in place not

be effective. It was determined that after these few strategies were in place, evidence of the increase would be reflected in Sunday school participation and involvement.

Members, excited to see attention given to a church ministry that needed a "jolt," were willing to support the efforts. They were able to express and present these concerns to their own groups and respectively to the entire focus group.

Conclusion

As planned, pre-test surveys were instrumental in helping the participants understand the lack of youth involvement in Sunday school. But most importantly, the surveys allowed the necessary discussions and meaningful dialog to take place that allowed recommendations, solutions, and to attain the intended goal of the project.

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